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HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH 1977

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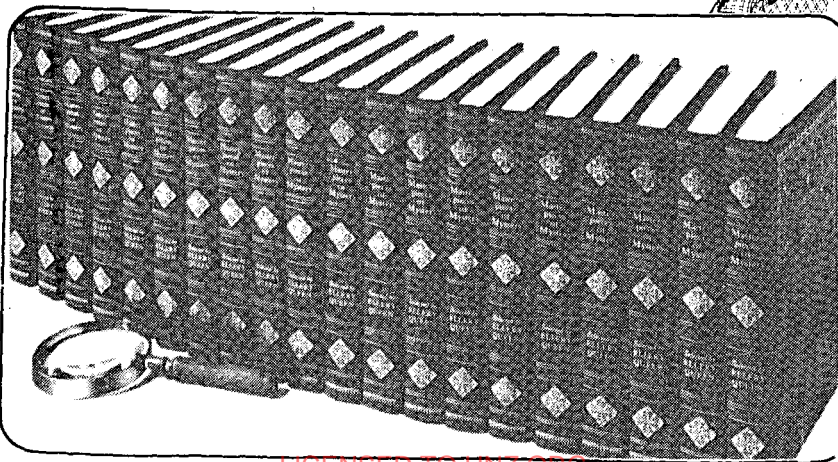
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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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March 1977



Dear Reader:

Of the twelve calendar months established under Julius Caesar, March is the most mysterious and unpredictable. It is a month charged with menace and uncertainty, contrast and contradiction. There are the Ides of March; the winds of March; the mad hatters, the lambs and lions of March.

And knowing that you have learned to expect only the unexpected from this most ambiguous of months, we can predict only the unpredictable for you this issue. Innocence disguised as guilt and vice versa; loyalty—and royalty too—where you least expect it; an intriguing mix of honesty and dishonesty, sanity and madness, reality and illusion.

So when the wind rattles your windows, settle down with this latest *AHMM* and let *it* rattle *you*. And even if March should turn out to be lamblike this year, one thing we *can* promise you: *AHMM* won't.

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

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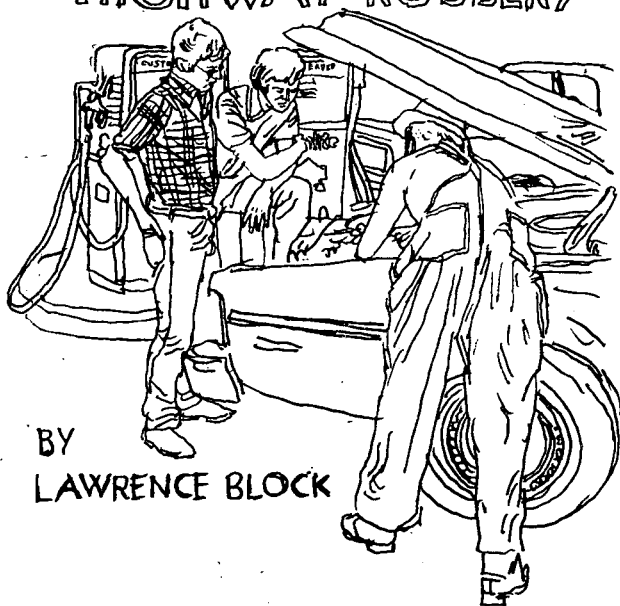
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*It was a situation where they were damned if they did,
damned if they didn't . . .*

NOTHING SHORT OF HIGHWAY ROBBERY



BY
LAWRENCE BLOCK

I eased up on the gas pedal a few hundred yards ahead of the service station. I was putting the brakes on when my brother Newton opened his eyes and straightened up in his seat.

"We haven't got but a gallon of gas left if we got that much," I told him. "And there's nothing out ahead of us but a hundred miles of sand and a whole lot of cactus, and I already seen enough cactus to last me a spell."

He smothered a yawn with the back of his hand. "Guess I went and fell asleep," he said.

"Guess you did."

He yawned again while a fellow a few years older'n us came off of the front porch of the house and walked our way, moving slow, taking his time. He was wearing a broad-brimmed white hat against the sun and a pair of bib overalls. The house wasn't much, a one-story clap-board structure with a flat roof. The garage alongside it must have been built at the same time and designed by the same man.

He came around to my side and I told him to fill the tank. "Regular," I said.

He shook his head. "High-test is all I got," he said. "That be all right?"

I nodded and he went around the car and commenced unscrewing the gas cap. "Only carries high-test," I said, not wildly happy about it.

"It'll burn as good as the regular, Vern."

"I guess I know that. I guess I know it's another five cents a gallon or another dollar bill on a tankful of gas, and don't you just bet that's why he does it that way? Because what the hell can you do if you want regular? This bird's the only game in town."

"Well, I don't guess a dollar'll break us, Vern."

I said I guessed not and I took a look around. The pump wasn't so far to the rear that I couldn't get a look at it, and when I did I saw the price per gallon, and it wasn't just an extra nickel that old boy was taking from us. His high-test was priced a good twelve cents a gallon over everybody else's high-test.

I pointed this out to my brother and did some quick sums in my head. Twelve cents plus a nickel times say twenty gallons was three dollars and forty cents. I said, "Damn, Newton, you know how I hate being played for a fool."

"Well, maybe he's got his higher costs and all—being out in the middle of nowhere and all, little town like this."

"Town? Where's the town at? Where we are ain't nothing but a wide place in the road."

And that was really all it was. Not even a crossroads, just the frame house and the garage alongside it, and on the other side of the road a café with a sign advertising home-cooked food and package goods. A couple of cars over by the garage, two of them with their hoods up and

various parts missing from them. Another car parked over by the café.

"Newt," I said, "you ever see a softer place'n this?"

"Don't even think about it."

"Not thinking about a thing. Just mentioning."

"We don't bother with nickels and dimes no more, Vernon. We agreed on that. By tonight we'll be in Silver City. Johnny Mack Lee's already there and first thing in the morning we'll be taking that bank off slicker'n a bald tire. You know all that."

"I know."

"So don't be exercising your mind over nickels and dimes."

"Oh, I know it," I said. "Only we could use some kind of money pretty soon. What have we got left? Hundred dollars?"

"Little better'n that."

"Not much better though."

"Well, tomorrow's payday," Newt said.

I knew he was right but it's a habit a man gets into, looking at a place and figuring how he would go about taking it off. Me and Newt, we always had a feeling for places like filling stations and liquor stores, 7-11 stores and like that. You just take 'em off nice and easy; you get in and get out, and a man can make a living that way. Like the saying goes, it don't pay much but it's regular.

But then the time came that we did a one-to-five over to the state pen and it was an education. We both of us came out of there knowing the right people and the right way to operate. One thing we swore was to swear off nickels and dimes. The man who pulls quick-dollar stick-ups like that, he works ten times as often and takes twenty times the risks of the man who takes his time setting up a big job and scoring it. I remember Johnny Mack Lee saying it takes no more work to knock over a bank than a bakery and the difference is dollars to doughnuts.

I looked up and saw the dude with the hat poking around under the hood. "What's he doing now, Newt? Prospecting for more gold?"

"Checking the oil, I guess."

"Hope we don't need none," I said. "'Cause you just know he's gotta be charging two dollars a quart for it."

He did a good job of checking under there, topping up the battery terminals and all, then he came around and leaned against the car door. "Oil's O.K.," he said. "You sure took a long drink of gas. Good you had enough to get here. And this here's the last station for a whole

lot of highway."

"Well," I said. "How much do we owe you?"

He named a figure. High as it was, it came as no surprise to me since I'd already turned and read it off of the pump. Then as I was reaching in my pocket he said, "I guess you know about that fan clutch, don't you?"

"Fan clutch?"

He gave a long slow nod. "I suppose you got a few miles left in it," he said. "Thing is, it could go any minute. You want to step out of the car for a moment I can show you what I'm talking about."

Well, I got out, and Newt got out his side, and we went and joined this bird and peeked under the hood. He reached behind the radiator and took ahold of some damned thing or other and showed us how it was wobbling. "The fan clutch," he said. "You ever replace this here since you owned the car?"

Newt looked at me and I looked back at him. All either of us ever knew about a car is starting it and stopping it and the like. As a boy Newt was awful good at starting them without keys. You know how kids are.

"Now if this goes," he went on, "then there goes your water pump. Probably do a good job on your radiator at the same time. You might want to wait and have your own mechanic take care of it for you. The way it is, though, I wouldn't want to be driving too fast or too far with it. Course if you hold it down to forty miles an hour and stop from time to time so's the heat won't build up—"

Me and Newt looked at each other again. Newt asked some more about the fan clutch and the dude wobbled it again and told us more about what it did, which we pretended to pay attention to and nodded like it made sense to us.

"This fan clutch," Newt said. "What's it run to replace it?"

"Around thirty, thirty-five dollars. Depends on the model and who does the work for you, things like that."

"Take very long?"

"Maybe twenty minutes."

"Could you do it for us?"

The dude considered, cleared his throat, spat in the dirt. "Could," he allowed. "If I got the part. Let me just go and check."

When he walked off I said, "Brother, what's the odds that he's got

that part?"

"No bet a-tall. You figure there's something wrong with our fan clutch?"

"Who knows?"

"Yeah," Newt said. "Can't figure on him being a crook and just spending his life out here in the middle of nowhere, but then you got to consider the price he gets for the gas and all. He hasn't had a customer since we pulled in, you know. Maybe he gets one car a day and tries to make a living off it."

"So tell him what to do with his fan clutch."

"Then again, Vern, maybe all he is in the world is a good mechanic trying to do us a service. Suppose we cut out of here and fifty miles down the road our fan clutch up and kicks our water pump through our radiator or whatever the hell it is? By God, Vernon, if we don't get to Silver City tonight Johnny Mack Lee's going to be vexed with us."

"That's a fact. But thirty-five dollars for a fan clutch sure eats a hole in our capital, and suppose we finally get to Silver City and find out Johnny Mack Lee got out the wrong side of bed and slipped on a banana peel or something? Meaning if we get there and there's no job, then what do we do?"

"Well, I guess it's better'n being stuck in the desert."

"I guess."

Of course he had just the part we needed. You had to wonder how a little gas station like that would happen to carry a full line of fan clutches, which I never even heard of that particular part before, but when I said as much to Newt he shrugged and said maybe an out-of-the-way place like that was likely to carry a big stock because he was too far from civilization to order parts when the need for them arose.

"The thing is," he said, "all up and down the line you can read all of this either way. Either we're being taken or we're being done a favor for, and there's no way to know for sure."

While he set about doing whatever he had to do with the fan clutch, we took his advice and went across the street for some coffee. "Woman who runs the place is a pretty fair cook," he said. "I take all my meals there my own self."

"Takes all his meals here," I said to Newt. "Hell, she's got him where he's got us. He don't want to eat here he can walk sixty miles to

a place more to his liking."

The car that had been parked at the café was gone now and we were the only customers. The woman in charge was too thin and rawboned to serve as an advertisement for her own cooking. She had her faded blonde hair tied up in a red kerchief and she was perched on a stool smoking a cigarette and studying a *True Confessions* magazine. We each of us ordered apple pie at a dollar a wedge and coffee at thirty-five cents a cup. While we were eating, a car pulled up and a man wearing a suit and tie bought a pack of cigarettes from her. He put down a dollar bill and didn't get back but two dimes' change.

"I think I know why that old boy across the street charges so much," Newt said softly. "He needs to get top dollar if he's gonna pay for his meals here."

"She does charge the earth."

"You happen to note the liquor prices? She gets seven dollars for a bottle of Ancient Age bourbon. And that's not for a quart either. That's for a fifth."

"I nodded. "I just wonder where they keep all that money."

"Brother, we don't even want to think on that."

"Never hurt a man to think."

"These days it's all credit cards anyways. The tourist trade is nothing but credit cards and his regular customers most likely run a monthly tab and give him a check for it."

"We'll be paying cash."

"Well, it's a bit hard to establish credit in our line of work."

"Must be other people pays him cash. And the food and liquor over here, that's gotta be all cash; or most all cash."

"And how much does it generally come to in a day? Be sensible. As little business as they're doing—"

"I already thought of that. Same time, though, look how far they are from wherever they do their banking."

"So?"

"So they wouldn't be banking the day's receipts every night. More likely they drive in and make their deposits once a week, maybe even once every two weeks."

Newt thought about that. "Likely you're right," he allowed. "Still, we're just talking small change."

"Oh, I know."

But when we paid for our pie and coffee, Newton gave the old girl a smile and told her how we sure had enjoyed the pie, which we hadn't all that much, and how her husband was doing a real good job on our car over across the street.

"Oh, he does real good work," she said.

"What he's doing for us," Newt said, "he's replacing our fan clutch. I guess you probably get a lot of people here needing new fan clutches."

"I wouldn't know about that," she said. "Thing is I don't know much about cars. He's the mechanic and I'm the cook is how we divvy things up."

"Sounds like a good system," Newt told her.

On the way across the street Newt separated two twenties from our bankroll and tucked them into his shirt pocket. Then I reminded him about the gas and he added a third twenty. He gave the rest of our stake a quick count and shook his head. "We're getting pretty close to the bone," he said. "Johnny better be where he's supposed to be."

"He's always been reliable."

"That's God's truth. And the bank, it better be the piece of cake he says it is."

"I just hope."

"Twenty thousand a man is how he has it figured. Plus he says it could run three times that. I sure wouldn't complain if it did, brother."

I said I wouldn't either. "It does make it silly to even think about nickels and dimes," I said.

"Just what I was telling you."

"I was never thinking about it, really. Not in the sense of doing it. Just mental exercise, keeps the brain in order."

He gave me a brotherly punch in the shoulder and we laughed together some. Then we went on to where the dude in the big hat was playing with our car. He gave us a large smile and held out a piece of metal for us to admire. "Your old fan clutch," he said, which I had more or less figured. "Take hold of this part. That's it, right there. Now try to turn it."

I tried to turn it and it was hard to turn. He had Newt do the same thing. "Tight," Newt said.

"Lucky you got this far with it," he said, and clucked his tongue and heaved the old fan clutch onto a heap of old metallic junk.

I stood there wondering if a fan clutch was supposed to turn hard or easy or not at all, and if that was our original fan clutch or a piece of junk he kept around for this particular purpose, and I knew Newton was wondering the same thing. I wished they could have taught us something useful in the state pen, something that might have come in handy in later life, something like your basic auto mechanics course. But they had me melting my flesh off my bones in the prison laundry, and they had Newt stamping out license plates, which there isn't much call for in civilian life, being the state penal system has an official monopoly on the business.

Meanwhile Newt had the three twenties out of his shirt pocket and was standing there straightening them out and lining up their edges. "Let's see now," he said. "That's sixteen and change for the gas, and you said thirty- to thirty-five for the fan clutch. What's that all come to?"

It turned out that it came to just under eighty-five dollars.

The fan clutch, it seemed, had run higher than he'd thought it would. Forty-two fifty was what it came to, and that was for the part exclusive of labor. Labor tacked another twelve dollars onto our tab. And while he'd been working there under the hood, our friend had found a few things that simply needed attending to. Our fan belt, for example, was clearly on its last legs and ready to pop any minute. He showed it to us and you could see how worn it was; all frayed and just a thread or two away from popping.

So he had replaced it, and he'd replaced our radiator hoses at the same time. He fished around in his junkpile and came up with a pair of radiator hoses he said had come off our car. The rubber was old and stiff with little cracks in the surface, and it sure smelled like something awful.

I studied the hoses and agreed they were in terrible shape. "So you just went ahead and replaced them on your own," I said.

"Well," he said, "I didn't want to bother you while you were eating."

"That was considerate," Newt said.

"I figured you fellows would want it seen to. You blow a fan belt or a hose out there, well, it's a long walk back, you know. Course I realize you didn't authorize me to do the work, so if you actually want me to take the new ones off and put the old ones back on—"

Of course there was no question of doing that. Newt looked at me for a minute and I looked back at him and he took out our roll, which I don't guess you could call a roll any more from the size of it, and he peeled off another twenty and a ten and added them to the three twenties from his shirt pocket. He held the money in his hand and looked at it and then at the dude, then back at the money, then back at the dude again. You could see he was doing heavy thinking, and I had an idea where his thoughts were leading.

Finally he took in a whole lot of air and let it out in a rush and said, "Well, hell, I guess it's worth it if it leaves us with a car in good condition. Last thing either of us wants is any damn trouble with the damn car. This fixes us up, right? Now we're in good shape with nothing to worry about, right?"

"Well," the dude said.

We looked at him.

"There is a thing I noticed."

"Oh?"

"If you'll just look right here," he said. "See how the rubber grommet's gone on the top of your shock-absorber mounting, that's what called it to my attention. Now you see your car's right above the hydraulic lift, that's 'cause I had it up before to take a look at your shocks. Let me just raise it up again and I can point out what's wrong."

Well, he pressed a switch or some such to send the car up off the ground; and pointed here and there underneath it to show us where the shocks were shot and something was cutting into something else and about to commence bending the frame. "If you got the time you ought to let me take care of that for you," he said, "because if you don't get it seen to you wind up with frame damage and your whole front end goes on you, and then where are you?"

He let us take a long look at the underside of the car. There was no question that something was pressing on something and cutting into it. What the hell it all added up to was beyond me.

"Just let me talk to my brother a minute," Newt said to him, and he took hold of my arm and we walked around the side.

"Well," he said, "what do you think? It looks like this old boy here is sticking it in pretty deep."

"It does at that. But that fan belt was shot and those hoses was the next thing to petrified."

"True."

"If they was our fan belt and hoses in the first place and not some junk he had around."

"I had that very thought, Vern."

"Now as for the shock absorbers—"

"Something sure don't look altogether perfect underneath that car. Something's sure cutting into something."

"I know it. But maybe he just went and got a file or some such thing and did some cutting himself."

"In other words, either he's a con man or he's a saint."

"Except we know he ain't a saint, not at the price he gets for gasoline, and not telling us how he eats all his meals across the road and all the time his own wife's running it."

"So what do we do? You want to go on to Silver City on those shocks? I don't even know if we got enough money to cover putting shocks on, far as that goes."

We walked around to the front and asked the price of the shocks. He worked it all out with pencil and paper and came up with a figure of forty-five dollars, including the parts and the labor and the tax and all. Newt and I went into another huddle and he counted his money and I went through my own pockets and came up with a couple of dollars, and it worked out that we could pay what we owed and get the shocks and come up with three dollars to bless ourselves with.

So I looked at Newt and he gave a great shrug of his shoulders. Close as we are, we can say a lot without speaking.

We told the dude to go ahead and do the work.

While he installed the shocks, me and Newt went across the street and had us a couple of chicken-fried steaks. They wasn't bad at all even if the price was on the high side. We washed them down with a beer apiece and then each of us had a cup of that coffee. I guess there's been times I had better coffee.

"I'd say you fellows sure were lucky you stopped here," the woman said.

"It's our lucky day, all right," Newt said. While he paid her, I looked over the paperback books and magazines. Some of them looked to be old and secondhand but they weren't none of them reduced in price on account of it, and this didn't surprise me much.

What also didn't surprise us was when we got back to find the shocks installed and our friend with his big hat off and scratching his mop of hair and telling us how the rear shocks was in even worse shape than the front ones. He went and ran the car up in the air again to show us more things that didn't mean much to us.

Newton said, "Well, sir, my brother and I, we talked it over. We figure we been neglecting this here automobile and we really ought to do right by it. If those rear shocks is bad, well, let's just get 'em the hell off of there and new ones on. And while we're here I'm just about positive we're due for an oil change."

"And I'll replace the oil filter while I'm at it."

"You do that," Newt told him. "And I guess you'll find other things that can do with a bit of fixing. Now we haven't got all the time in the world or all the money in the world either, but I guess we got us a pair of hours to spare, and we consider ourselves lucky having the good fortune to run up against a mechanic who knows which end of a wrench is which. So what we'll do, we'll just find us a patch of shade to set in and you check that car over and find things to do to her. Only things that need doing, but I guess you'd be the best judge of that."

Well, I'll tell you he found things to fix. Now and then a car would roll on in and he'd have to go and sell somebody a tank of gas, but we sure got the lion's share of his time. He replaced the air filter, he cleaned the carburetor, he changed the oil and replaced the oil filter, he tuned the engine and drained and flushed the radiator and filled her with fresh coolant. He gave us new plugs and points, he did this and that and every damn thing he could think of, and I guess the only parts of that car he didn't replace were ones he didn't have replacement parts for.

Through it all, Newt and I sat in a patch of shade and sipped Cokes out of the bottle. Every now and then that bird would come over and tell us what else he found that he ought to be doing, and we'd look at each other and shrug our shoulders and say for him to go ahead and do what had to be done.

"Amazing what was wrong with that car of ours," Newt said to me. "Here I thought it rode pretty good."

"Hell, I pulled in here wanting nothing in the world but a tank of gas. Maybe a quart of oil, and oil was the one thing in the world we didn't need, or it looks like."

"Should ride a whole lot better once he's done with it."

"Well, I guess it should. Man's building a whole new car around the cigarette lighter."

"And the clock. Nothing wrong with that clock, outside of it loses a few minutes a day."

"Lord," Newt said, "don't you be telling him about those few minutes the clock loses. We won't never get out of here."

That dude took the two hours we gave him and about twelve minutes besides, and then he came on over into the shade and presented us with his bill. It was all neatly itemized, everything listed in the right place. All of it added up and the figure in the bottom right-hand corner with the circle around it read \$277.45.

"That there is quite a number," I said.

He put the big hat on the back of his head and ran his hand over his forehead. "Whole lot of work involved," he said. "When you take into account all of those parts and all that labor."

"Oh, that's for certain," Newt said. "And I can see they all been taken into account all right."

"That's clear as black and white," I said. "One thing, you couldn't call this a nickel and dime figure."

"That you couldn't," Newton said. "Well, sir, let me just go and get some money from the car. Vern?"

We walked over to the car together. "Funny how things work out," Vern said. "I swear people get forced into things, I just swear to hell and gone they do. What did either of us want beside a tank of gas?"

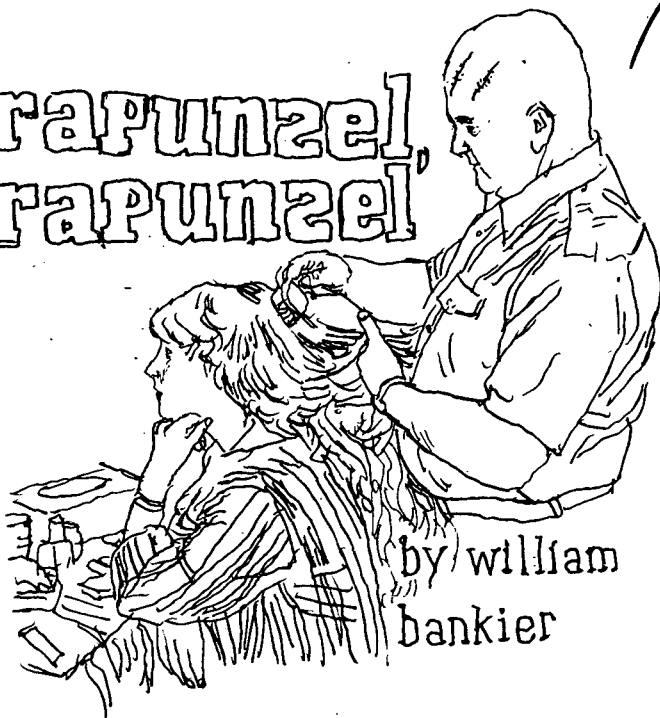
"Just a tank of gas is all."

"And here we are," he said. He opened the door on the passenger side, waited for a pickup truck to pass going west to east, then popped the glove compartment. He took the .38 for himself and gave me the .32 revolver. "I'll just settle up with our good buddy here," he said, loud enough for the good buddy in question to hear him. "Meanwhile, why don't you just step across the street and pick us up something to drink later on this evening? You never know, might turn out to be a long ways between liquor stores."

I went and gave him a little punch in the upper arm. He laughed the way he does and I put the .32 in my pocket and trotted on across the road to the café. Turnabout's fair play, they say.

Some messages are worse than no message at all . . .

rapunzel,
rapunzel



by william
bankier

When somebody kidnapped Manny Korman's daughter, it made a lot of waves at police headquarters. Not that Detective-Sergeant Korman was particularly loved by his colleagues. Too often he had been seen trotting to his car with his rifle held muzzle-down in one hand, lowering it gently onto the nesting blanket in the trunk, slamming the lid and testing the lock, and only then walking back slowly to the bank or liquor store or wherever to check on the condition of the man lying on

RAPUNZEL, RAPUNZEL

17

the sidewalk.

"These guys are punks," Korman said on more than one occasion. "They carry guns and they don't hesitate. The best thing I can do is shoot them down. The quicker the better."

This simplistic philosophy had won Korman a number of citations in the past. At the same time, it earned him the underworld's enmity which, unlike its individual members who entered Manny's rifle sights, refused to die.

Now somebody had taken Iris Korman, fifteen years old, the long-haired, gently smiling light of Manny's life. The ransom note, an erratic collage of words and letters clipped from a weekend newspaper, did not demand cash. It said,

"Korman. Resign from the force.

Hand in your badge. Mean it.

Or never see Iris again."

It was a strange communication, almost like a message within a family. The police psychologist who expressed that opinion went on to say, "And no wonder. Korman is really no different from the worst of them. He's every bit as vicious. The difference is, society approves of his killing."

"Not all of it." This response was from the Chief.

"All of society or all of his killing?"

"Both."

Had Korman been present when the conversation took place, he would have had plenty to say. More than once the Chief had tried to curb the detective's enthusiasm for knocking hoodlums dead in the streets.

"This city is not your private shooting gallery, Korman. We are expected to apprehend criminals in the commission of crimes. There are other ways than putting a slug in the head."

"I'm just trying to reduce the recidivism rate," Korman said. He was in a bantering mood; two dead out of three involved in trying to take a liquor store that morning. Some sort of tip-off had been flashed an hour in advance, giving Korman time to stake himself out in a warehouse window across the street. "Too many hoods get out of jail only to harass the community again," he said.

The Chief's running argument with Korman was weakened when the mob killed Korman's wife. To be sure, it was Manny they were after,

not Beverly, but she was ahead of him that day and got into the car first, starting the engine with a view to warming up the interior before her husband got in. Manny was five steps away when the device went off, sending the front seat straight up through the roof.

Korman himself was knocked out, his skull ripped by flying fragments. The resulting surgery left two long scars upon which hair refused to grow. Korman reacted to this indignity by instigating a grosser one, having his head shaved regularly to maintain an artificial baldness—a rude parody, he admitted, of the well-known television cop.

But Korman had none of the warmth and grace of his TV counterpart. A nasty desperation settled over him. Previously, he had gone about his killing with a sort of exuberance. Now he was sullen about it, withdrawn, like any middle-aged clerical worker locked into a defeated life.

Almost his only pleasure now, certainly the only activity he enjoyed with another human being, was the ritual of brushing his daughter's hair. Iris would surprise him half-asleep before the television set.

"Are you going to be around for a while, Dad?"

"Sure." Where would he go?

"I'm going to shower and wash my hair. Will you brush it out for me?"

"A pleasure."

Her hair reached almost to her waist, chestnut brown, coarse, and thick. When it was dried and free of snarls, parted in the middle and fragrant with balsam rinse, she was like a heroine from a fairy tale.

Korman would draw the brush in long crackling strokes through the great mane as Iris sat with a straight back, staring solemnly into the mirror. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel," he would intone, "let down your hair." And she would smile. The dialogue had been the same since early childhood.

After the car bombing, Korman made himself a more difficult target for his enemies. He was, of course, always armed and alert and now he ceased to own an automobile. Instead he began using different modes of transport—today a bus, tomorrow the subway, another day a taxicab. He varied his hours of departure too, from home and precinct. There was no way to get a good fix on him.

So they had reached him through the back door, hit him where it

hurt, taken his daughter. Surely this would put his gun to sleep once and for all. How could he risk the one more life that meant more to him than his own?

That question was put to Korman by one of a crowd of media men armed with portable tape recorders. He answered it, his large white head inclined forward, displaying the livid crescent scars, one of his globular eyes heavier-lidded than the other.

"The guys who took Iris are dead men," he said. "Put this on the air. Play it the way I'm saying it. No deals. If they drive up here now and deliver my daughter in a chauffeured limousine, they're dead the minute they get within range. That's all. It's too late for them."

Then Manny Korman turned his back and walked up the wooden steps and into his ground-floor flat, slamming the door behind him.

Reeny Bothwell was waiting for him. She looked almost as distraught as he did. Sometime during the past ten years, after she turned 35, she had stopped taking care of her appearance. Last year when Manny's wife was killed, Reeny made a minor comeback, changing her hair color, shedding five pounds, doing something with her eyes. For a month, or two she was quite attractive again, displaying a powdery ripeness, behaving protectively toward Korman whenever he would let her. One time only, they made love. It was fine as far as Reeny was concerned, but the experience must have disturbed Manny because he never made the move again.

Reeny had kept a key and now here she was, drinking an ounce of his gin from a kitchen tumbler and smoking noisily.

"It's no use," he said as soon as he saw her. Since they grew up in the same neighborhood, their minds seemed to be connected in a mysterious way; there was much that went without saying.

"Give him a break, Manny." She suspected her nephew Tim was involved in the kidnapping and she knew Korman thought so too.

"If he's got her, I'm going to kill him."

"He's only a kid."

"Iris just turned fifteen."

"Timmy's only eighteen. Somebody else must have planned it."

"O.K., then they used him. Because he was close to her." Korman took the glass out of Reeny's hand as she raised it to her lips. "I should never have let her go on seeing him. I knew he was trouble."

"You can't tell kids what to do," Reeny said. "Not even you, Manny."

He put a thumb across his shoulder, pointing toward the door. "Go home," he said. "I've got no time for you today." As she swept things into her handbag, he said, "And leave the key. I don't want you coming in here on me."

"Why not, for God's sake? I tidied up." And she had. The tabletop gleamed and there was the smell of wax in the air. "You need that, if nothing else."

"But I don't need Timmy Bothwell's friends waiting in here to bushwhack me after I kill him."

He took the key from her hand, avoiding her eyes. She said, "I don't believe what you've become," and left quickly, not hearing his reply.

"I haven't become. I always was."

Three days later, Reeny went to Tim's secret pad, ostensibly to give it a cleaning but largely in the hope that he might be there. It was a place nobody knew about except her. When Tim's father, Frank Bothwell, went to prison—a survivor, in fact, of one of Korman's shoot-ups—the boy's mother went almost immediately to live with a good-looking young electrician in the next building. So Tim turned to his Aunt Irene for meals and a temporary bed as well as for a loan.

He used the money to furnish the small flat, then began working at the post office to earn the rent. When an overtime check came in, he had wall-to-wall carpeting installed. It was cheap stuff but it made the tacky furniture look acceptable.

Reeny telephoned first from the telephone booth down the street, a procedure she adopted after her arrival—one day had embarrassed her nephew in bed with a girl. Not having a telephone of her own, she always used the one within sight of Tim's building. She liked to know who, if anybody, was flushed out by her calls.

"Hello?" Tim's voice was tense.

"It's me. You alone?"

"Not really."

"Is she with you? Iris?"

"Aunt Irene, don't mess in."

Then it was true. And her nephew, the only family that meant anything to her, was due to be killed by Manny Korman. "Why did you take her? Why let them drag you into this?"

"Let who? There's nobody in this but me and Iris."

"What?"

He explained it to her then. How Iris was as disturbed as anybody by the public executions carried out by her father in the name of law and order. How they staged the kidnapping as a ploy to induce him to turn in his badge.

"That's a crazy idea."

"It may work," Tim said. "Iris and I want to get married as soon as it's legal. She wants some peace."

Reeny's eyes were closed. She did not see Manny Korman approaching the phone booth at a pace near a run. She said, "But he won't buy any of that. He's said he'll kill you. . ."

The door flew open and Korman seized the receiver. Reeny screamed and all Korman managed to hear was a dial tone. "You were talking to Timmy, weren't you?"

"No." Reeny made herself believe it as she said, "I was warning your man, but it isn't Tim."

"I could take you in," Korman said almost to himself. He was looking up and down the street. "What are you doing in this neighborhood? This isn't your part of town; the kids live here."

"I want a cup of coffee." She walked toward a restaurant, not daring to look at the entrance of Timmy's building.

Korman caught up to her. "His pad must be around here."

"Buy me a coffee."

Reeny held him for twenty minutes at a back booth in a coffee shop, time enough for Tim and Iris to clear out. Then she agreed to show Korman where her nephew lived.

It was deserted when Reeny used her key to open the front door. "Now do you believe I came to do the floors?" she said.

She got out the vacuum cleaner and plugged it in, fitted the hose and the carpet implement, switched it on, and began cleaning the broadloom. Korman sat in a chair and stared at her. The sound of the electric motor and Reeny's stooping posture reminded him of his own efforts at home. Since losing his wife, he had discovered that woman's work was not easy. It was backbreaking, for example, to run the vacuum cleaner. Especially in Iris's room when . . .

Suddenly the significance of Reeny's actions jolted his mind. After sliding the implement back and forth over the broadloom, she would

lift it up to disentangle from its teeth a swirl of long brown hair. It was exactly his procedure when he did Iris's floor.

Reeny noticed him watching and tried to put herself between Korman and the machine. He got up and reached around her to take the strands of hair. His face was grey, his eyes like murky glass. "All right," he said, "she's been here and you warned him on the phone. Now where did he go?"

"I don't know." She was frantic. "Listen, she isn't even kidnapped. She ran away with him. She's in on it."

The words had no meaning for Korman. "I can make you talk," he said. He took her by the arm.

Then Iris Korman spoke from the doorway. "It's true, Dad. Timmy and I wanted to make you stop."

Korman turned and saw his daughter standing beside Tim Bothwell. They were holding hands. It was as if an extremely bright light began to shine inside his head while heavy bells tolled underwater.

"Come on, boy," he said, moving between them, separating their hands, leaving his daughter in the room as he propelled Timmy Bothwell down the stairs.

"Where are you taking him?" Iris shouted.

"Just for questioning," Reeny said, wondering when she had decided to be Korman's accessory.

Korman and Tim clattered down the first flight of steps and half of the second before Korman drew his pistol and shot the boy in the head. Iris came running and wailing, followed by Reeny. They found Korman sitting on the stairs and Timmy's body on the landing below.

"I twisted my ankle," Korman said. "I asked him to wait, but he took off."

This story was the version accepted by the police board of inquiry. Irene Bothwell, going all the way now, testified that she heard Sergeant Korman order the kidnapper to stop. Iris Korman said otherwise, but her haunted eyes and her speech, slurred by sedatives, detracted from her credibility. Besides, if it was not a kidnapping, what was she doing living with the son of a convicted criminal anyway?

The case was closed and Korman took his daughter home.

But she was not inclined to stay. He watched her throwing things into the backpack she had carried the previous summer when they

went hiking in Oak Hills. There had been hollows clogged with dry leaves and she'd walked just ahead of him, the leaves swirling about her legs, her long hair braided and tied behind her head. Rapunzel, Rapunzel. . .

Now he stood in her bedroom doorway. "Where will you go?"

"I have friends—never mind who. I want them alive."

"You're underage. I could make you stay."

"You'd have to keep me locked in a tower," she said.

After she moved out, Reeny Bothwell shifted her things into Manny's flat and began doing for him full time. He needed it because he began to become forgetful, showing up for duty on his off-day or not reporting when he was expected. His appearance deteriorated too, and he did not always answer when spoken to.

But it was on the firing range that the disintegration of Manny Korman was most apparent. His hand trembled, his chest heaved with convulsive breathing, perspiration trickled into his squinted eye, and he seldom made an inner, let alone a bull's-eye.

The time was right for the force to rid itself of an embarrassing public-relations problem. Manny Korman went on extended sick leave which was sure to evolve into an early retirement.

"Any word from Iris?" Once in a while Manny would ask Reeny the question. And she would answer, "Nothing. Not a word."

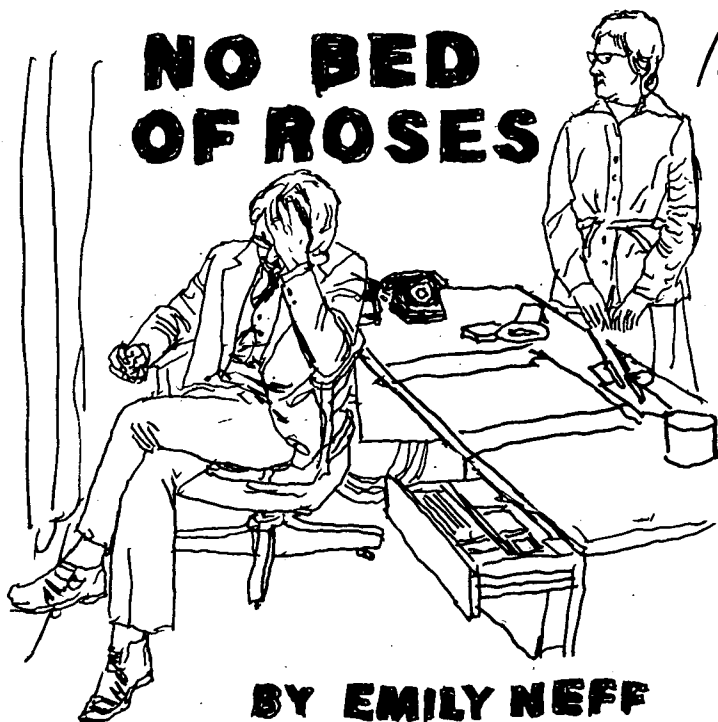
Then he would curse her out, and punish her further by not eating the good meals she prepared. He was convinced she was hiding something from him, some communication from the daughter he adored who must still love him, he told himself, no matter what he had done.

And he was not entirely wrong. The brown-paper parcel had been left on the back doorstep months ago by somebody familiar with the lanes behind the buildings. Because there was no name on the wrapping, Reeny opened it. Then she resealed it with tape and string and tucked it out of sight at the back of the top shelf in the hall cupboard.

Now she, Reeny, was waiting. A time would come when Manny would push her too far with his bad-mouthing and callous indifference to her feelings. Then she would produce the package and watch him open it. It would be interesting to see his face when he discovered what his beloved daughter had sent him—a thick hank of chestnut hair, crudely shorn and carelessly tied with a few inches of cheap twine.

In some circles it's hard to find anyone you can trust . . .

NO BED OF ROSES



BY EMILY NEFF

"There is a . . . gentleman who insists on seeing you," Miss Hinchley said with prim disapproval. She opened the door of George Maxwell's private office the minimum distance to admit her bony frame sidewise, squeezed through, and quickly shut the door behind her, as if the mere proximity of the stranger might pollute this sanctum. "He won't tell me his name or business, but he said to give you this." She advanced to Maxwell's desk and placed an envelope on the blotter.

"A mystery man, eh?" Maxwell smiled at his secretary's indignation. He liked Miss Hinchley. He liked the air of importance and busyness she lent the office. As an official in the shipping company owned by his father-in-law, Maxwell's position was mainly titular, and the atmosphere of activity generated by Miss Hinchley was largely phony. Still, he appreciated her little farce—it was preferable to the overt boredom of previous secretaries, worldly young ladies who yawningly did their nails and read magazines.

He opened the envelope and unfolded the single sheet of paper within. There was no message, simply a date scrawled in pencil—"April 17."

The smile slid away from Maxwell's mouth and left a grimace of unexpected pain. He pressed his fingers to the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes briefly, trying to calm his thoughts, which were scattering like a flock of quail in the sudden shadow of a hawk.

Miss Hinchley cleared her throat decorously.

"Wants to see me, does he?" Maxwell stalled, crumpling the paper into a tight ball. He should have been prepared for this—it had haunted him for more than a year. And yet the possibility had lessened with each passing day until he had almost been lulled into thinking he was safe.

"I told him you were busy," Miss Hinchley said conspiratorily.

Maxwell forced his features into a smile. "But I'm not busy, Miss Hinchley. Show him in."

"Yes, sir." Miss Hinchley was too well trained to disagree with her employer, even by her tone of voice.

Maxwell rose and walked to the window, clasping his hands behind him to control their trembling. Seven floors below him, on Baronne Street, people walked purposefully in the wilting morning heat of the New Orleans July. How lucky they were, wrapped up in their meager everyday problems.

He turned to see a short blunt-faced man of about forty, wearing a soiled seersucker suit and holding his hat in his hands. Behind him, Miss Hinchley hovered in the doorway as if to say, "You see what a sorry sight he is? I warned you."

"Thank you, Miss Hinchley. I'll buzz if I need you." Moving with studied calm, he reseated himself behind his desk and surveyed his visitor. "What's the mystery?" he asked lightly. "What can I do for you?"

Playing it innocently was his only chance.

The man fingered his hat and eyed the carpeted, paneled office. "Kirby is the name," he said, his eyes meeting Maxwell's directly, almost insolently. "Jim Kirby. I drive a cab. You probably don't remember me. But I remember you."

It was as bad as George Maxwell had expected—possibly worse. "Kirby?" he said vaguely. "Should I remember you?"

"Not by name," Kirby said. "But I guess you remember taking a cab to a certain address on Pitt Street the night of April seventeenth a year ago?"

Maxwell looked thoughtful. "I've taken a lot of cabs to a lot of places. April, last year? That was a long time ago."

"It was," Kirby admitted. "But I thought that particular date would stick in your mind."

Maxwell looked at the smug face before him. "What made you think that?"

"Mind if I sit down?" Kirby pulled up a chair without waiting for an answer, and lowered himself into it. "April seventeenth was the night Adele Beaumont was murdered."

Maxwell unfolded Kirby's crumpled note and began shredding it systematically into confetti. "I remember the case," he said. "The murder was front-page news for weeks. But I fail to see the connection."

"If you paid the lady a visit the night she was murdered, I guess the police would see a connection."

"That's absurd. I didn't even know her. You've obviously made a mistake—and a rather serious one, I might add."

Kirby seemed to examine Maxwell's face inch by inch. "No mistake. I've got a good memory for faces. I've been looking for you for over a year. In a city like New Orleans, I figured I'd spot you sooner or later, if you were still around, and last week I did. I followed you and asked a few questions. And here I am."

"You're mistaken. I'm not the man you drove to Pitt Street that night. It was dark and it was raining and it was a long time ago."

Kirby grinned. "You remember the rain?"

Maxwell flushed angrily. "Everyone who read the papers remembers that it was raining—and everything else about the case."

"I'll bet you followed the papers closer than most, didn't you, Mr. Maxwell? I'll bet you were sweating buckshot. Remember the picture

the *States-Item* ran of me? 'Was he the chauffeur of death?' I liked that 'chauffeur of death.' Both the papers interviewed me, and ran my description of you—medium height, early forties, brown hat, tan rain-coat."

"That could apply to any number of men."

"Sure it could. That's why they never found you. But *I've* found you. Even with your moustache. When did you start growing that, Mr. Maxwell? The day after the murder?"

Maxwell sprang to his feet angrily. "Now see here, I've had enough of this nonsense. I ought to report you to the police."

Kirby tilted back in his chair. "Why don't you?"

Maxwell clenched his teeth. He mustn't panic. "Because, Mr. Kirby, I see no reason to involve myself in a scandal through the wild imaginings of a cab driver. I am willing to forget the matter if you give me your word to walk out of here and not annoy me further."

Kirby raised his bushy eyebrows guilelessly. "That's mighty big of you, Mr. Maxwell. Real generous. To tell you the truth, though, I was hoping you'd be a little more generous than that."

Maxwell's hands were beginning to shake again and he thrust them into his pockets. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, friend. Why do you think I came to you instead of going to the cops? Because I'm good-hearted, that's why. Because I'd hate to send a fellow-human to the chair. I figured it might be worth something to you if I kept my mouth shut. Say a small sum the first of every month? I've always wanted a little place across the lake where I could take it easy, go fishing—Mandeville, maybe, or Covington. You got any suggestions?"

"I don't give a damn where you go fishing," Maxwell snapped.

"Don't you like fishing, Mr. Maxwell?" Kirby looked surprised. "That's funny. I had the idea you did a lot of fishing. And golfing. And sailing. I had the idea your wife's daddy paid you a big salary just for sitting behind that desk." He glanced at the hand-blocked drapes, the Hobbs etchings. "It must be nice to have a layout like this. You got a bar?"

With enormous effort, Maxwell restrained himself from lunging forward and landing a punch on Kirby's insolent face. He desperately needed time to think. The stand he took now was of supreme importance. He mustn't hesitate, mustn't contradict himself.

"Get out of here," he said quietly.

Kirby shrugged. "No deal, huh? Well, it's your funeral. Guess I'll have to do my civic duty and tell the cops I've found their man. No skin off my teeth."

"The police take a dim view of blackmailers," Maxwell reminded him.

Kirby threw his head back and laughed. "I'll risk it," he said. "Personally, I never heard of a murderer bringing suit." He stood, clapped his hat on his head, and started toward the door. Pausing with his hand on the knob, he said, "Sure you won't reconsider?"

"Get out."

Kirby refused to be hurried. "I sure hate to turn you in, Mr. Maxwell. And your wife—it would just about break her heart, wouldn't it? Maybe I could make a deal with *her*."

Maxwell stiffened. "Don't you dare go to my wife with your evil insinuations. Don't you *dare*!"

Kirby scratched his neck. "Well, I want to be fair about this. Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you until six o'clock tonight to change your mind." He returned to the desk and wrote a phone number on the memo pad. "If I don't hear from you—well, I think I can do business with the Mrs." He paused and fingered the scraps Maxwell had made of his original note. "What's the matter? Afraid Miss Pruneface might file that?"

Maxwell bent and swept the scraps toward the wastebasket so viciously that they scattered across the carpet.

"Take it easy," Kirby grinned. "I'm going."

After he had gone, Maxwell leaned his head on his hands, pressing his palms into his eyes. What was he going to do? It was obvious that his bluff hadn't worked—Kirby seemed unshakably positive in his identification. Would the police take the word of such a man against Maxwell's flat denial? The time element was in his favor. It was not likely that the district attorney would press charges on the testimony of a witness who claimed to have seen him once, a year ago, on a rainy night. But it was possible.

Maxwell got up and began to pace the office. Blackmail was out of the question. It would be an admission of guilt, and Mavis would be bound to question any large regular withdrawals of money. Her

money. The thought of his wife's sharp, probing questions made him shudder.

But if he didn't submit, would Kirby really go to Mavis?

Whether he liked it or not, he would have to have a talk with Mavis—and before Kirby did.

Maxwell reached for his coat and slipped Kirby's telephone number in his pocket. In the outer office Miss Hinchley was typing industriously—probably a letter to her niece.

"I'm leaving early," he told her. "Can you carry on?"

"Yes, sir." Her gaunt face puckered with concern. "I hope you're not ill?"

Driving home in his custom-built car, Maxwell thought about how he had got into this sordid mess. It seemed so unfair—a trick of circumstance.

His mistake had been in getting involved with Adele Beaumont in the first place. But even as he admitted that, another part of his mind knew that it had been inevitable. He had met her at a time when his emotional life with Mavis had seemed unendurably barren. He had been starved for love—not merely physical love, but warmth and tolerance and companionship. He had found all of these with Adele. Of course, she had tricked him too, but until he had known that he had been a happy man.

George Maxwell had been thirty-two when he married Mavis. Up to then his life had been a series of small failures—financial, romantic, and social. He was drifting, a nonentity. One day he looked at the wealthy, supremely unattractive daughter of Herbert Rothrock, head of the shipping company where he was a clerk, and saw his solution. Mavis was several years older than he was, fat, nearsighted, and shy. Despite her wealth, she had never been proposed to before, and she accepted him without hesitation.

He had expected that the marriage would give him a good job with Rothrock, plenty of money, leisure in which to spend it, a social niche, and a minimum of domestic demands. It answered all these requirements but the last.

Overnight, it seemed, Mavis developed into a possessive, domineering wife. She smothered Maxwell, surrounded him, guarded him like a trophy.

After eight years of it, Maxwell began his liaison with Adele Beaumont, a pretty, slender, stylish divorcée, delicate where Mavis was gross, tender where Mavis was brusque.

He had been meticulously careful. When he gave Adele money (he was as generous as was feasible with Mavis holding the purse strings), he gave cash. When he visited her on Pitt Street he went at night, and parked his car a few blocks away. They never went out together. He phoned her often, but always from a public phone, and he never wrote to her—even a line.

He had made only one blunder.

April 17. Mavis had been late for dinner that night. She had come in shaking the rain from her coat and complaining that the garage door had jammed as she was closing it. He had been annoyed because he had planned to see Adele that night, and both cars were in the garage.

Mavis had gone to her room early, and when he slipped out at nine the rain had become a downpour. After getting thoroughly soaked wrestling with the garage door, he gave up. He was illogically angry at Mavis, as if she had jammed the door on purpose to keep him at home, and walked to St. Charles and Napoleon. There he hailed a cruising cab and went straight to Adele's house. The subterfuge of getting out a block away, although it occurred to him, had seemed foolhardy in the driving rain.

And now, a year later, Kirby was prepared to swear that he had driven Maxwell to the house on Pitt Street at nine-thirty on the night of April 17. At eight the next morning, April 18, the maid had found Adele Beaumont dead on the living-room floor, two bullets in her heart.

But George Maxwell had not killed her.

He had rung the bell and waited, then let himself in with the key Adele had given him. Only the entrance-hall light was on, and he had groped his way into the front room and switched on a table lamp, calling Adele's name. He knew she was expecting him. When he saw her crumpled on the floor, his first thought was that she had fainted, or fallen. He bent over her, thankful that he had come. It took him a while to realize she was dead. He had never seen a dead person before. He kept talking to her, shaking her.

Then, displacing the grief and the questions, came the sudden freezing realization of his own position. Here he was, George Maxwell, in

the room with a murdered woman who was his mistress. He took out his handkerchief and rubbed fiercely at any object he might have touched. He left the house stealthily, hurrying through the steady rain to the closest bus. He was home by ten-thirty, drenched to the skin. Mavis was asleep, thank God, and he passed her door quietly and slipped into bed, into a sleep wild with nightmares.

The afternoon papers, which reached his desk at noon, were full of the story. "PARTY GIRL MURDERED," the headlines read. "POLICE GRILL MEN FRIENDS." Party girl? Adele? Maxwell could not believe it. But there it was, in black and white.

So he had not been the only one. It had been vanity to think that an attractive woman like Adele would be content with the furtive, infrequent visits of a married man. There had been other men, and one of them had killed her.

Whoever it was, Maxwell hated him. Hated him for destroying the source of his only happiness. Hated him for the grim timing which had made the murder coincide with the night of his visit, implicating him in a crime of which he was utterly innocent.

The police turned up several suspects, men who, unlike Maxwell, had been careless in their gifts of personal checks and traceable jewelry. But no conclusive evidence could be found against them, nor any motive.

The papers finally dropped the story, but Maxwell knew the police had not dropped it, and he could not forget that somewhere in New Orleans was a man who might someday point at him and say: "There's the murderer."

He became afraid to be seen on the street. He cultivated a moustache. He never took a cab, avoided crowds, and refused to be photographed.

Sometimes in his dreams he thought he really was a murderer, running, gun in hand, from armies of policemen and fleets of taxis.

Maxwell saw the gardener's truck parked in front of his house and remembered that this was the day Mavis had ordered the roses. He put the car in the garage and walked across the lawn to where his wife was supervising the work of two men, her voice brisk and authoritative. Her back was to him and he observed how ludicrous she looked in slacks.

She turned quickly at his voice, glancing at her wristwatch. "Why, hello, George. What brings you home at noon? Are you sick?"

"No. Something came up. I want to talk with you."

"What is it?"

"It's personal," he said.

"All right." She walked with him to a cluster of deck chairs on the other side of the yard.

"It's all utter nonsense, of course," he began. "The man's crazy. But I wanted to talk to you first—before he did."

"Who?" Mavis asked impatiently. "What are you talking about?" She stripped off her gardening gloves and lit a cigarette. He watched her stubby manicured hands and remembered how slender and tapering Adele's hands had been.

"A man came to see me today, a cabdriver by the name of Kirby. He claimed he could identify me as the man he drove to the house of Adele Beaumont the night she was murdered. You probably remember reading about the case—it was about a year ago, I think. Anyway, this fellow had the gall to try to blackmail me. He threatened to go to the police with his story."

He had Mavis's complete attention. "And?"

Maxwell shrugged nervously. "And I threw him out, of course."

Mavis leaned forward and grasped his arm, her face blotchy. "Is he going to the police?"

"Not yet. He seems to want money badly. He said he would come to you if I wouldn't pay him. I won't let you see him, of course, but I wanted to tell you."

Mavis took a puff of her cigarette. "Suppose he goes to the police?"

"Well, suppose he does? It would be damned embarrassing, but that's all. I never even knew the woman, much less went calling on her."

"Oh, yes you did, George. Don't lie to *me*." She watched him steadily with her small keen eyes.

Maxwell felt suddenly as if the last support had been swept from under him. "Mavis, you don't think. . ."

"I don't think, I *know*. I knew all along you were seeing that woman." She cut off his mumbled protests. "Oh, let's not have a scene about it. After all, she's dead. I had hoped not to have to humiliate you by telling you I knew, but now it looks as if you're in a mess."

"Mavis, before God I did not kill Adele Beaumont."

"I know you didn't. You wouldn't kill a fly. But you did go to her house that night? Tell me the truth!"

Maxwell put his face in his hands. "Yes. I went."

"You fool." She looked at him furiously. "You complete fool! You couldn't use the car, so you took a taxi in that rain to see your precious Adele."

"My God, Mavis, I didn't know she was going to be killed. How do you think I felt, walking in and finding her body?"

"This is worse than I thought." Mavis stamped out her cigarette. "We'll have to pay this Kirby. How much does he want?"

"He didn't say. Plenty, I imagine."

"Can you get in touch with him?"

"He gave me a phone number. Look, Mavis, I don't like blackmail. I'd rather make a clean breast of things to the police. I should have done that a year ago, I suppose, but I was scared, I wasn't thinking straight. I'll tell them the truth, Mavis. I'm sick of living like a criminal. I'm innocent. They'll have to believe me."

"Why risk it? Why drag your name—and mine—through the mud? I don't like blackmail either, but I can afford it. Call Kirby. Tell him to come here tonight."

For once, Maxwell was grateful for his wife's interference. With her usual blunt assurance, she had assessed the problem and decided on a course of action. Whether she was right or wrong, it was a relief to let her handle it. And maybe she was right—maybe blackmail *was* better than exposure.

Mavis came into the house with him while he telephoned Kirby.

"This is Maxwell," he said. "I've been thinking about your offer. Can you come out to the house at about eight tonight? I'd rather not see you at my office again."

"Now you're talking," Kirby said.

Mavis whispered something, and Maxwell added, "I'd appreciate it if you don't park your cab too close to the house. You understand?"

"Sure, friend. I always play my cards close to my chest."

Maxwell hung up and nodded to his wife.

"Don't worry," Mavis said. "I have a feeling everything will work out all right. Why don't you have Mattie fix you a bite to eat and then take a nap or go play some golf? You're in no condition to go back to the office. . . ."

At a few minutes before eight, the front-door chime sounded and Maxwell himself went to open it.

"Hello, Mr. Maxwell." Jim Kirby walked into the foyer, looking even more obnoxiously cocky than he had in the morning. He was wearing the grey uniform and visored cap of the company he worked for.

Maxwell took him into the study, a small side room opening onto the garden. "Have a chair," he said. "And let's make this brief. How much money did you have in mind?"

Kirby sank into an easy chair. "Your wife's not around, is she?"

"Unfortunately, she is. But I told her I was expecting an insurance man. If she should come in, just play along, will you?"

"Oh, sure." Kirby grinned. "Well, Mr. Maxwell, how about a thousand dollars a month? That shouldn't break you. And I could use it."

Maxwell felt the blood rise in his face. "That's fantastic!" he cried. "I'm doing this to avoid a scandal. I'm not a murderer."

"You're not?" Kirby said mildly. "O.K. But that's my price."

"And how do I know you won't double your price when you feel like it?"

"You don't." Kirby started as the door swung open and Mavis entered smilingly. She was carrying a tray with two highballs and a plate covered by a napkin.

"I'm sure you men can do with a little refreshment," she said, setting the tray on a table.

"Mavis, this is Mr.—James. My wife," Maxwell said.

Kirby got to his feet. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Maxwell."

Mavis shook his hand warmly. "Do sit down. What sort of insurance are you in, Mr. James?"

"Life insurance," Kirby told her, glancing at Maxwell with a half smile.

"Well, I'm not going to interrupt," Mavis went on. "I just brought you some drinks and something to munch on." She handed them each a glass and then picked up the napkin.

What happened next was a blur. There was a muffled gunshot and Kirby slouched back in his chair, limp, with a widening circle of red staining his chest. His highball glass fell to the floor, the spilled whiskey instantly absorbed by the thick rug.

Mavis replaced the gun on the tray and hurried to Kirby's body.

"Quick," she told Maxwell, "help me move him!"

Maxwell stood as if frozen. He wetted his dry lips. "Mavis," he said. "Mavis. . ."

"Come on!" she said furiously. "Do you want bloodstains on the chair?"

Together they half carried, half dragged the heavy body through the French doors and onto the flagstone terrace. Only then did Mavis straighten up and look at her husband. "It had to be done," she told him flatly. "You should have done it, but I knew you couldn't."

"You planned to kill him all along?"

"Of course. It was the only way."

"But the body—how are you going to get rid of it?"

"That's all arranged," she said. "I had the gardeners dig the grave this afternoon. They thought they were digging a bed for the roses."

Maxwell shuddered. She actually sounded pleased with herself. Proud.

He watched her go through Kirby's pockets deftly, removing his wallet, papers, keys, and finally a small revolver. "You see," she said.

They pulled Kirby's body across the darkened yard and rolled it into the neat coffin-shaped hole. Then, working with feverish strength, Maxwell shoveled it half full with dirt, then inserted three rose bushes, their roots neatly wrapped in burlap.

When the bed was filled and smooth, Mavis stepped back admiringly. "They look nice, don't they?" she remarked. "They're Nocturnes. I hope they'll do well there."

Exhausted, his hands torn by thorns, Maxwell followed his wife back through the French doors into the study, where he stood watching while she tidied up, scrubbing the place on the rug where the highball had spilled, putting the glasses back on the tray. She examined the chair where Kirby had been sitting and seemed satisfied. "I was afraid there'd be a bullet hole." She stooped and picked up Kirby's cap. "One more thing. The cab."

Maxwell groaned. He had forgotten about it. "What do we do—bury it too?" he asked without humor.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," she said dryly. "You must drive it to the top of the bridge and leave it. I'll follow you in the car and pick you up."

"You mean they'll think he jumped? We need a body in the river to

prove that."

"Remember the Vories suicide? His body was never found." She collected Kirby's cap, wallet, and gun and gave them to Maxwell. "Here, stop these in the water. Leave the keys in the ignition."

"I can't do it, Mavis. What if I'm seen?"

"There's not much bridge traffic at this hour. All you have to do is stop the car, get out, and start walking. I'll stop for you farther on."

"I don't like it."

She handed him his untouched highball, warm now and flat. "Have a little Dutch courage!"

Kirby had left his cab at the corner. Maxwell got in, waited until he saw Mavis back the car out of the driveway, then headed toward Claiborne Avenue, the controls of the car strange and stiff in his gloved hands. Beside him on the seat were Kirby's cap and wallet. And the gun. Mavis kept a discreet half-block behind him as he sped out Claiborne and into Jefferson Highway.

Once a pedestrian tried to flag him down, and he experienced a moment of terror before remembering that he was, after all, driving a taxi.

It was ten o'clock when he reached the Huey P. Long Bridge, a soaring grey span over the dark water. At the very top, he pulled over and stopped, jumped out, and—with no other cars in sight—dropped Kirby's things over the railing. Then he started at a half run along the sidewalk, his legs hardly able to support him. Two cars whizzed past and he prayed that the drivers didn't take particular notice of him. He knew it would be only minutes before someone reported an abandoned car on the bridge.

Finally, after what seemed hours, he heard Mavis pull alongside and call him. He flung himself into the car and lay back against the seat, taking deep, shuddering breaths. He opened his eyes only when they were back on the highway.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?" she asked.

He stared disbelievingly at her calm snub-nosed profile. Her hands were perfectly steady on the wheel. She might have been driving home from a card party.

A terrible thought was taking form in his mind.

"Mavis," he said slowly. "The night Adele Beaumont was murdered

the garage door wasn't really jammed shut, was it?"

"Of course it was."

"Not jammed. Nailed. You did that to keep me from going to her house that night, didn't you? Because you knew she was dead."

Mavis was silent.

"You killed Adele."

His wife kept her eyes on the road. "Why, George," she said. "What an idea!"

Maxwell did not sleep that night. Toward daylight, he fell into a fitful rest in which he dreamed of roses—great, thick-petaled, heavy-scented roses, which grew up all around the house and choked up the doors and windows.

Mavis would not hear of his going to work that day. She gave him a sedative and phoned Miss Hinchley that he would not be in. Maxwell submitted docilely. He had the queer detached feeling that he and Mavis were the same person, welded together by evil. She brought him the evening paper, and they read it together. The police superintendent was quoted as strongly suspecting suicide in the case of the missing taxi driver.

The following day Maxwell returned to the office. It was a relief to see things moving along as usual in the Rothrock Building. Miss Hinchley was typing in the front office as he entered. She looked up with pleasure. "Good morning, Mr. Maxwell! It's good to see you back! I hope you're quite recovered."

"Quite, thank you, Miss Hinchley."

"I'm glad. If you have a moment, sir, I'd like to speak with you."

"Come right in."

She followed him into his office and waited while he hung up his hat and coat. She was such an amusingly formal old girl.

"Well," he said, seating himself at his desk and glancing at the mail. "What's on your mind?"

"I'd like a raise, Mr. Maxwell." The cameo at her throat quivered.

"A raise, eh? Well. How much do you think you're worth?"

"A great deal, Mr. Maxwell."

He looked up sharply. "Oh?"

"Yes, sir." She blushed. "You see, I've discovered that the rude gentleman who upset you so much on Tuesday was Mr. Kirby, the

man the papers say killed himself. I recognized his picture."

"You're wrong, Miss Hinchley. That man on Tuesday was a dockworker by the name of Murphy. He wanted to discuss some union trouble."

"I think not, sir. I made a tape recording of your conversation with him—in case you needed to refer to it later."

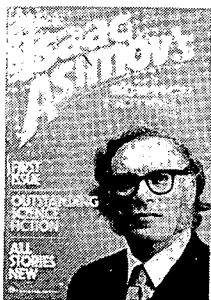
Maxwell turned chalk-white. "Where is this thoughtful tape recording?"

"In my safe-deposit box," Miss Hinchley said. "It was a very interesting conversation, Mr. Maxwell."

The situation suddenly struck Maxwell as supremely funny—a huge joke on Mavis and himself. He began to laugh, gently at first, and then loudly, uncontrollably, until the tears came.

Miss Hinchley watched him apprehensively, wondering if he had lost his mind and, in any case, what would happen next.

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To be admitted or not was the burning question . . .

GETTING IN

by
**Barry N.
Malzberg**



So I go to the admissions office of the Residence and explain my problem. Bankrupt marriage, complaining mistress, problems in the class placement of my elder daughter, financial worries; career deadening and closing in rapidly as I approach my fortieth birthday. "I'd like to be put away for a while," I say. "A controlled environment if you will; Just someone to take the responsibilities away. They can't get at me here and, anyway, at least intermittently I feel that I'm going crazy."

Cooperatively they put me through tests. They are very good at the residence in that way; anyone may apply, anyone has as good a chance as anyone else, granted the need. Blood count, urinalysis, electrocardiograph just to verify organic damage or the lack of it, and the functional stuff: thematic apperception, gestalt, free association, the projective battery, Stanford-Binet, and of course the sexual-preference series. It all goes very quickly, spurred on by my own conviction that I'm showing satisfactory madness. And then I am called into the charting room where the most solemn of the supervisors looks up from my new file on his desk and says, "I'm sorry, we have no place for you here. You are absolutely sane."

"Sane?" I say. "Living this kind of life, involved with the people I know, the depressions, the guilt, the self-loathing, the grief-stricken dreams in the night?"

"All normal—all part, I am sorry to say, of the pattern for males of your chronology and socioeconomic status. You have no idea how common it is. No, we're unable to help you. You are completely sane."

"I won't be if this goes on."

"Fear of incipient madness is one of the signs of sanity," the supervisor says. "You have to be reasonable. You must accept your responsibilities. Most men go through this kind of thing, you know."

"I can't take it any more."

"No one's happy," the supervisor says. He looks down at my file, shakes his head. "You should hear about *my* mistress," he offers.

So I return home to my children and my wife and then, as is my custom, go to the supermarket for the next day's provisions. I had resolved to say nothing to them about my application for the Residence; right up to the moment of commitment I had resolved to be steadfast, to meet all of my responsibilities. Now of course there would be no point in telling them anything. What would my wife say if she knew what in the judgment of the best authorities I am sane? How would my daughters deal with a non-crazy daddy? On the way to Food Village I pause at Wonder Waffles to make a quick call to my mistress. I see her on Fridays and Tuesdays and phone her every other day at least twice. Sometimes I see her on Wednesdays and Saturdays as well, but these are catch-as-catch-can visits, depending upon how my schedule works out home. My first commitment I have always felt is to my family.

"Well," she says in her angry voice, "it's about time I heard from you."

"I called as quickly as I could."

"I suppose you don't care how long I was by the phone waiting. And you have to do, you monster, is pick up the phone and just ring. It's like I'm out on the desert somewhere."

I have heard all this before and should know how to deal with it by this time. In fact I *do* know how to deal with it—it is the fact that I no longer want to that drove me to the Residence. Still, I must be steady and fast. Venting my own pain and rage would merely extend the conversation and at any moment some neighbor might walk into Wonder Waffles, see me at the pay phone, and make deductions that could be passed on to my wife. "I'm sorry," I say. "You know I love you."

"You're just using me. You don't know what love is."

"I know exactly what love is and I do love you."

"No you don't, you monster," she says, "you're just using me to make your own miserable life work." And she begins to cry. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she says, "I don't mean to be this way, you just can imagine what it's like to live for one person only and that person—"

"I do know," I say, "I do know. I live for you too."

Chocolate malteds burble merrily in the Wonder Waffles shaker near the pay phone and I continue in this manner, barely able to hear her for the whirring, but after a while the operator says that my initial period is up, and I say I have no more change and hang up the phone quickly, ignoring the ringback. She is in many ways a lovely and lovable person, my mistress, but when she becomes this way it costs at least one dollar and seventy-five cents to calm her down and I can't take the risk in Wonder Waffles.

It wouldn't have helped matters to have told her that I was sane, particularly since she is often apt, in her lovely and lovable way, to call me a crazy person.

I go to my office and look at the drafting boards, convinced more than ever that I have wasted my career, that it's all futile. An assistant comes in and looks at me questioningly: it takes me several minutes to remember that I had made an appointment with him yesterday and broken it because of my decision to go to the Residence. I had intended to fire him, and though I find my mood has shifted I say

"You're very gifted, but your gifts don't quite fit into the situation here. We're all convinced that—"

"That I'd be much happier seeking another situation," he says and bursts into tears. He falls from his chair, claws and screams, gnaws at the carpet, begins to utter loud prayers. After a while I pick up the phone and notify the company medical unit. They come and look at him solemnly and sometime after that equipment and personnel from the Residence arrive and take him away. I follow his disappearance with envious eyes.

I seek to patch up things with my wife and make it really well between us, but all of the time I am thinking of my mistress. So I make time the next day, a Wednesday, to go and see my mistress. But even though she is in one of her better moods I am thinking of my wife. I leave her much disturbed and on the way home am seized with regret and stop at Wonder Waffles to phone her. As I say hello my wife and daughters walk in and stare at me. "Goodbye," I say and my mistress curses me. I blunder toward my wife and daughters, saying, "I was just ringing home but you were out, you were out," and my wife says, "What are you doing in Wonder Waffles making phone calls in the middle of the afternoon?" My daughters commence to quarrel between themselves and a very lively discussion ensues, the details of which are somewhat blurred.

I hire a new assistant who I perceive on the second day has already been taken into management's confidence and is spying on me and monitoring my telephone calls. I tell my mistress that I will no longer be able to call her so frequently and never from the office. She says I am a monster and possibly insane.

My wife says we are growing further apart.

My elder daughter is put into an open classroom which is also available to my younger daughter, and murderous passions arise between the two since the younger now feels smarter and the elder dumber than before.

My mistress says that she feels I am abstracted all the time and that

in all likelihood I am cheating on her.

So I go to the Residence and state my case reasonably. They pull my file and the supervisor says regretfully, "I'm sorry. You are sane. You are absolutely sane. I regret it but there is nothing we can do for you. You will have to face your problems and sink beneath them like most of the rest of us."

I pull out the Smith & Wesson .38 bought illegally just yesterday and shoot him in the left hand.

"You're sane," he says desperately, brandishing his right hand in a military manner. "You're sane."

I shoot him in the right leg. "You're sane," he says, kicking out with his left. "This is the world, you must live in it. You have no choice." I shoot him in the heart. All the way down to the floor he repeats, "You're sane. . .you're sane. . .you're sane. . ."

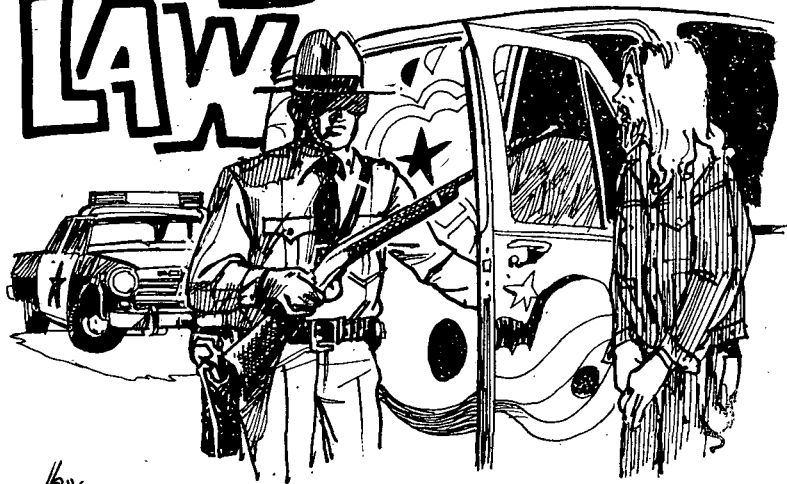
The doors open then and all of them come in: wife, mistress, daughters, spying assistant, the proprietor of Wonder Waffles—everyone, in fact, except my prior assistant who is safely at rest behind the walls. And as I wait for the message they will give me, I wonder if I'll have the strength and purpose to respond to it with the gun.



The April issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale March 15.

Could Jefferson possibly have had the cut of a man's hair in mind when he spoke of equal and exact justice for all men? . . .

THE GUN LAW



by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Deke Allen was arrested Friday afternoon on his way home from his uncle's house in Yorktown Heights.

He'd had a call that morning from his father. Mostly just to ask how Deke was doing, how was business, how's that girl what's-her-name, the one you live with, pretty little thing. So forth. But during the call his father mentioned that Uncle Bill was having a problem with rats in his basement. Deke's father said, "If you happen to be heading up that

way you can drop by and pick up my shotgun. Take it on up to Bill's and see if you can take care of those rats for him."

Uncle Bill didn't like to put down poison because he had a houseful of dogs. He adopted stray dogs; it was his avocation. The place—a four-acre farmstead near the Croton Reservoir—was fenced in to contain the cacâphony of orphaned dogs. Deke liked Bill and had nothing better to do that Friday. His next job wasn't scheduled to start till Monday. So he went by his father's house in Ossining and picked up the pump-action sixteen-gauge and a boxful of shells for it, and drove out along Baptist Church Road to his uncle's dog farm.

Deke Allen tended to carry just about anything a human being might need in his Microbus. It was his factory, craft-shop, tool-warehouse, and repair center. Deke, in his anachronistic two-bit way, was a building contractor. He specialized in restorations of old houses, preferably pre-Revolutionary houses; there were plenty of them in the Putnam County area and he had a good deal of work, especially from young New York City couples who'd made themselves a little money and moved to the country and bought "handyman special" antique houses for low prices, hoping to meet the challenge. Most of them learned that it was harder work than they'd thought; most of them had city jobs to which they had to commute and they simply didn't have enough time to repair their old houses. So when an old cellar sprang a leak or an old beam needed shoring up or an old wall crumbled with dry-rot, Deke Allen would arrive in his Microbus with his assortment of tools. Most of them were hand-made tools and some of them actually dated back to Colonial times. He was especially proud of a set of old wooden planes. He'd had to make new blades for them, of course, but the wooden housings were the originals—iron-hard and beautifully smooth and straight. And he carried buckets filled with old squarehead nails and other bits and pieces of hardware he'd retrieved from condemned buildings and sheriff's auctions and the Ossining city dump.

He kept all his toolboxes and hardware in the Microbus; he'd built the compartments in. He even had a little pull-down desk in the back where he could do his paperwork—measurements, billings, random calculations, the occasional poem he wrote. He kept an ice cooler in the back for soft drinks and beer and the yogurt he habitually consumed for lunch. Deke was a health-food nut. The only thing he never carried in the truck was marijuana; he knew better than that. Show a

state cop a psychedelically-painted Microbus driven by a young-looking 25-year-old with scraggly blond hair down to his shoulder blades and a wispy yellow beard and moustache and a brass ring in his left ear—show a state cop all that and you were showing him a natural reefer repository. So the grass never went into the Microbus. And he was always careful to carry only unopened beer cans in the ice cooler. It was legal so long as it was unopened. Deke got roused about once every three weeks by a state cop on some highway or other. It was an inconvenience, that was all. You had to put up with it or get a haircut and change your lifestyle. Deke wasn't tired of his lifestyle yet, not by a long shot. He liked living in the tent with Shirley all summer long. Winters they'd spring the rent for an apartment. This was March; they were almost ready to move out of the furnished room-and-a-half; but they were still living indoors and that was why his father had been able to reach him on the boarding-house phone.

This particular Friday he went on up to Uncle Bill's dog farm and went inside with the shotgun. They took a lantern down into the dank basement and they sat down until the light attracted the rats. They'd put earplugs in; it was the only way to stand the noise in the confined space. When Uncle Bill judged that all the rats were in sight, Deke handed him the shotgun and Bill did the shooting. Deke didn't like guns, didn't know how to shoot them, and didn't want anything to do with them. He was lucky he'd been 4-F or he'd probably have dodged the draft or deserted to Canada. It was one moral decision that hadn't been forced upon him, however, and he was just as happy he hadn't had to face it. He was half deaf, it seemed, the result of too much teenage exposure to hard rock music at too many decibels. Deafness qualified you for a 4-F draft status. It also made life fairly miserable sometimes; he wasn't altogether deaf, not by a wide margin, but there were sounds above a certain register that he couldn't hear at all and he generally had to listen carefully to hear things that normal people could hear without paying any attention. Conversation, for example. If he looked at TV—which wasn't often, since he and Shirley didn't own one—he had to sit close to the set and turn the sound up to a level that was uncomfortably loud for most other people in the room.

But he could hear it all right when Shirley whispered in his ear that she loved him.

When Bill got finished shooting the rats he handed the gun back to

Deke and went down across the basement floor with a burlap sack to pick up the corpses so they wouldn't make maggots and houseflies or stink up the house. They left the basement—it was then about two in the afternoon—and had a couple of sodas out of Deke's ice cooler. They talked some, mostly about the dogs that kept jumping up and trying to lick Deke's beard. Finally Deke slid the shotgun carelessly across onto the passenger seat, got in, and drove out of the yard. Behind him Uncle Bill carefully closed the six-foot-high gate to keep the dogs in.

A few miles down the road a state cop pulled Deke over because one of the bolts had fallen out of the rear license plate and the plate was hanging askew by one bolt, its corner scraping the pavement and throwing the occasional spark. Deke because of his hearing problem hadn't heard the noise it had been making. The cop had to use the siren and the flashers and get right up on top of the Microbus before Deke knew he was there. Deke hadn't been speeding or anything. He figured it for another tiresome marijuana shakedown. He was glad he didn't have beer on his breath; they'd had sodas back at Bill's, not beers.

He pulled over against the trees and got out, reaching for his wallet. The cop was walking forward; behind him the lights on top of the cruiser were still flashing, hurting Deke's eyes so Deke looked away and waited for the cop to come up.

"Your license plate's hanging crooked," the cop said. "A lot of sparks. Could hit the gas tank. You want to fix it."

Deke was relieved. "Say, thanks." He opened up the back of the Microbus and the cop saw all the tools and hardware in there. Deke got out a screwdriver and found himself a nut and bolt in one of the compartmentalized toolboxes. He fixed the license plate back in place. Meanwhile, the cop was hanging around. One of those beefy guys with a Texas Ranger hat and his belly hanging out over his Sam Browné belt. He wasn't searching the truck exactly—he was just hanging around—but when Deke went to get back in, the cop saw the shotgun on the passenger seat.

The cop's face turned cold. "All right. Get out slow."

Deke stood to one side and the cop slowly removed the shotgun from the seat. He worked the pump-action and a loaded cartridge flipped out of the breech. The cop stooped down to pick it up. "Loaded

and chambered. Ready to fire. What bank you fixin' to rob, boy?"

- After that it was inevitable. The cop handcuffed Deke and locked him in the cruiser's back-seat cage and drove him into the Croton barracks. There he was handed over to two other police types. They ran him on into Ossining and he was booked.

"Booked? For what?"

"Possession," the sergeant said.

Deke still didn't think much of it. He was a hippie type. They harassed hippie types on principle, these cops. They'd throw him in the tank overnight and tomorrow he'd have to hitch a ride back to pick up his truck.

Only it didn't work out that way.

Stanley Dern figured himself a pretty good country lawyer. He'd known Harv Allen for several years, not well but as a lawyer knows a casual client: he'd drawn Harv's will for him, done a few minor legal chores for him from time to time. When Harv called him about his son, Stanley Dern at first tried to put him off. "I'm not really a criminal lawyer, Harv."

"Nor is my son a criminal," Harv replied. He had an old-fashioned New England way of talking; the family—and Harv—was from New Hampshire.

"Well, I'll be glad to go down there and talk with him. Have they set bail?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Stanley Dern whistled through his teeth. "What's he charged with?"

"I can't remember the exact words. Possession of a deadly weapon, in substance."

"I'll see what I can do."

Stanley Dern had practiced in Ossining for thirty of his fifty-four years; he knew everybody in the district attorney's office and he knew most of the cops in town. Criminal court activity in Ossining had always been more intense than in other cities of comparable size because Ossining was the home of Sing Sing, the old New York State penitentiary.

Stanley Dern went to the Criminal Part Clerk and found out that the prosecution had been assigned to a young assistant D.A. named Dan Ellenburgh. Stanley didn't know this one; Ellenburgh was new.

He was also large, as Stanley found out when he entered the office. Ellenburgh was half-bald, small-eyed, and at least a hundred pounds overweight—a shame in such a young man, Stanley thought.

"Now it's a Sullivan Law violation," Ellenburgh said after he'd pulled out Deke Allen's file and looked into it to remind himself which case they were talking about. "Possession of a deadly weapon. He had it on the car seat right beside him. Armed and charged. Ready to fire."

"Now come on, Mr. Ellenburgh. That's a ten-year rap. The kid could get ten years."

"That's right," Ellenburgh said blandly. "Of course you'll probably cop a plea and he'll end up serving one-to-three and he'll be out in nine or ten months on good behavior."

"Nine or ten months out of the kid's life just because he helped his uncle shoot some rats?"

Ellenburgh put on a pair of granny glasses—Ben Franklins. They made him look ludicrous; they were far too small for the fleshy massiveness of his face. "Do you think we should just let any hippie kid ride around with a loaded gun on his car seat, counselor? What do you suppose we have gun laws for?"

"Mr. Ellenburgh, this young man isn't a dangerous felon. He's never been convicted of anything worse than a traffic violation. He runs his own business in this community. He's well-regarded by the people he's worked for. He may not cut his hair the way you might prefer but he's certainly not a menace. The facts in the case are clear enough, it seems to me."

"The facts in the case—it seems to *me*—are that the man was caught red-handed with a loaded gun on his car seat. That's in clear violation of the law. It's a felony law, counselor, and a loaded cocked shotgun is nothing if not dangerous. Therefore I've got to disagree with you. I'd classify this case as a dangerous felon."

"Come off it," Stanley Dern said.

"You think I'm playing some sort of game with you, counselor? Well, you come to court and see whether I am." And Ellenburgh got up and turned his back rudely, replacing the file in his steel cabinet, indicating plainly that the interview was ended.

Stanley Dern went down to the jail to see Deke Allen. He asked Deke if he wanted him to be Deke's lawyer. Deke said, "I'd love it, Mr. Dern, but all I've got is about forty dollars to my name right now.

If you'll put me on the cuff I can pay you off in instalments. Assuming it doesn't cost too much."

Stanley Dern didn't have any remote idea whether it would cost forty dollars or forty thousand to defend Deke Allen in this case. He said, "Never mind the fee, Deke. Whatever it is, I'll bill you no more than you can afford to pay. This idiot prosecutor's got me mad and when they get Stanley Dern mad they'd better hunker down and watch out."

Then Stanley Dern arranged with a bondsman to put up Deke's bail; it cost Deke's father \$2,500 but there was no question of his not paying it—Deke's father was a retired baker of no particular importance in the community and certainly no wealth, but he was a decent man and he loved his son even if he didn't understand his son's so-called life-style.

And finally Stanley Dern went into the law library at the firm where he worked and began to read up on the gun law.

The law stated quite clearly that it was illegal to carry a loaded weapon on one's person or in one's car except on one's own premises—home or place of business. For the benefit of hunters a loophole had been built into the law whereby you could carry a "non-concealable weapon"—that is, a shotgun or rifle—on your person or in your car so long as it was unloaded and broken down in such a way as to be not easily assembled and fired. The wording of the loophole was quite strict and specific. There was no way to get around it: the weapon, in order to escape the provisions of the gun law, had to be *unloaded* and *dismantled*. Clearly Deke Allen's case didn't meet those criteria. Technically he was guilty. Or so it appeared.

Stanley's instinct was to wait and see which judge's docket the trial would be set for. A reasonable and sympathetic judge would either throw the case out or, at the worst, administer a slap on the wrist to Deke.

But Stanley's heart fell when he saw the court calendar for that May 17th. *State of New York vs. Allen 5/17 CC Pt. III*. Criminal Court Part Three. That was Judge Elizabeth Berlin. Of them all she was the most hardnosed, the least tolerant of youthful offenders, the judge most inclined to mete out the harshest possible sentence.

Of course he could shoot for a jury trial, he supposed, but there wasn't much point in that; a jury could only determine the facts of a

case, not the law that pertained to it, and the facts of the case were such that in terms of a jury Deke couldn't help being held guilty as hell. And while a jury could *recommend* a lenient sentence it couldn't require one. It would still rest in the hands of Elizabeth "Lucrezia Borgia" Berlin.

Three years' minimum, Stanley thought dismally. Not to mention the permanent loss of citizenship rights: a felon, once convicted, could never again vote or hold public office or hold any number of jobs. Because he'd done his father and his uncle a harmless favor and been ignorant of the fine print of the state gun law, Deke Allen could have the rest of his life ruined.

It wasn't good enough.

Stanley went back to his law books. There had to be an answer.

Court day. Stanley and Deke waited silently in the courtroom while Judge Berlin dispensed several cases ahead of them. She was formidable in her grey suit, a white-haired woman with a humorous but unyielding face. Stanley had practiced before her for many years; he knew her quite well. She was not a nasty person, merely a sternly tough one: she was honest and, in terms of her own standards, fair—in that she dealt equally harshly with all guilty parties and equally sympathetically with innocent ones. (That is to say, those whose guilt was not proved. Trials do not establish innocence. They only establish whether or not the prosecution has proved its case.) She had, much to her credit, a fine shrewd sense of humor and she was not reluctant to laugh at herself when the situation called for it. It was her saving grace; trials in Part III often were highly entertaining because of the witty repartee between Ms. Berlin on the bench and the lawyers on the arena floor.

Two hours dragged by. Then a possession-of-narcotics case was continued to some future date and the bailiff rose to intone: "State versus Allen."

The arresting cop testified as to the circumstances of the arrest and the condition of the shotgun in the car at the time. Stanley cross-examined the cop with little hope of accomplishing anything useful. The cop stuck to his story: yes, the shotgun was handy, right there on the seat. Yes, it was assembled. Not only assembled but charged, loaded, and cocked. All you had to do was pull the trigger. The safety-catch wasn't even on.

When the prosecution rested its case, Ellenburgh was sweating; the fat man glared at Deke and Stanley before he went back to the D.A.'s table and sat down, wiping his face with a handkerchief. Then Stanley called his witnesses. He called Harv Allen to the stand. Harv testified how he'd given the shotgun to Deke and why; he also testified that Deke detested guns and never used them, not even for target practice. Then Deke's Uncle Bill got on the stand and told the story of the rat hunt—how he, not Deke, had shot the rats and how he'd handed the gun back to Deke afterward, not thinking to put the safety catch on or empty the gun. "It's my fault maybe more'n his," Uncle Bill said earnestly. "I know a little about guns, at least. The boy doesn't know a thing about them."

Then Stanley called a few character witnesses—people who knew Deke, people he'd worked for. They testified how he'd done good honest work for them, never stolen, worked like a beaver out of that cluttered old Microbus of his, always been amiable and cheerful—a little hard-of-hearing, maybe, but certainly not a criminal type.

All through the trial—it lasted about five hours, not counting the break for lunch—Deke's live-in girl friend Shirley sat right behind the rail and surreptitiously held hands with Deke. Judge Berlin saw that, of course, but she made no objection to it and Stanley was slightly encouraged by her evident sympathy for the boy. Just the same, he realized that the facts in the case were clear, that there'd been a violation of the felony law and that he was going to have to pull something very clever indeed if he was to save Deke from misery.

Ellenburgh made his closing argument—very brief, it didn't need much elucidation. Then Stanley stood up and addressed the bench.

"Your honor, I don't think anybody's disputing the facts in this case. We seem to be caught up on a legal issue rather than a factual one. My client makes no secret of the fact that he had the gun on his truck seat as the officer testified. That its presence was not intended for felonious purpose is, in the eyes of the law, immaterial. We seem to be faced with a mandatory situation here, wherein the accused—even though our sympathies may go out to him wholeheartedly—appears to be uncompromisingly guilty in the eyes of the law. Even a suspended sentence in this case would brand my client a felon for the rest of his life and deprive him of vital constitutional rights, as you know."

Judge Berlin watched him suspiciously: apparently Stanley was only

confirming the prosecution's case. She said, "Are you defending the young man or simply throwing him on the mercy of the court, Mr. Dern?"

"I'd like to defend him, your honor. I'd like to point out to the Court the provision of the state's anti-gun-possession statute which specifically exempts from prosecution the honest citizen who, for purposes of self-protection or otherwise, elects to keep a gun—loaded or otherwise—on the premises of his own home or place of business."

"Mr. Dern, I'm fully aware of that provision. I don't see how it applies in this case."

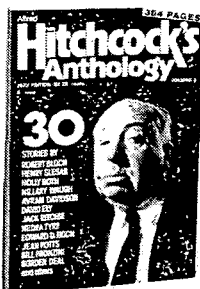
"Your honor," Stanley said quietly, "my client maintains, with perfectly good reason, that his Microbus is in fact his place of business."

There was a loud objection from prosecutor Ellenburgh but Judge Berlin had begun to laugh and Stanley knew by the tone of her laughter that he'd won.

Deke Allen told me, some time later, after he'd had time to reflect on the experience, "I guess Justice is blind. But the rest of us sure as hell have to keep our eyes open, don't we?"

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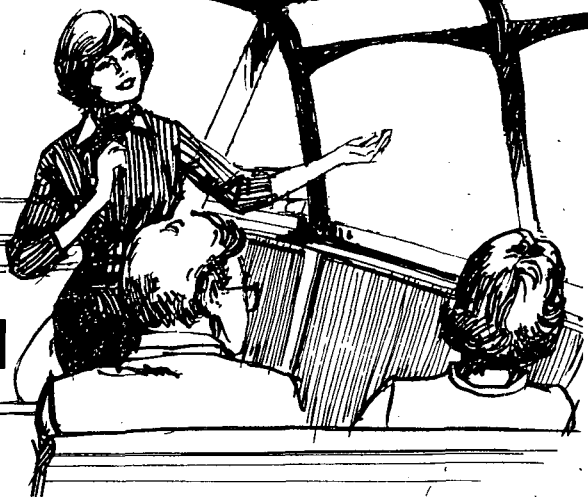
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AHMM377

There are public monologues and private dialogues . . .

BREAD UPON THE WATERS

by
**Edward
D. Hoch**



It was Julie Calmer's second summer working the tour boats in Toronto harbor. Wearing a white red-trimmed blouse and blue slacks, she sat up at the front of the boat giving her little talk through the public address system to the 120 or so paying customers who made up each hour-long trip.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and children," she'd begin, "and welcome aboard the *Island Queen*, one of eight tour boats oper-

ated by Star Sightseeing. If this boat looks familiar to some of you it's probably because it's identical to the glass-topped tour boats used on the canals of Amsterdam."

Then she talked about the various ships in the harbor as they made their way across to the Toronto Islands, a group of connected parks containing an amusement area, beaches, picnic grounds, yacht clubs, and marinas. The long low tour boat picked its way gently among the waterways separating the islands, guided by Tom Haining's gentle hand on the wheel. She was happy to be working with Tom again this summer. They got along well, and he even let her steer the boat sometimes on the return trips.

"Coming up on the ducks," Tom called to her as they passed the island airport at Hanlan's Point. "Get your bread ready."

The ducks were really a mélange of Canada geese, gulls, swans, and other birds that summered in the waters around the islands, living well off the tourist fare and the bread Julie and the other guides tossed them from the tour boats. Now, seeing them wading into the water from the shoreline, she ripped open a loaf of stale bread and began tossing slices out the hatch as she talked. Almost at once the boat was nearly enveloped in swooping, diving birds.

"They always wait for us," Julie explained to the passengers, exhausting the first loaf and opening a second. "They know we're good for a handout."

The craft passed under a bridge with inches to spare, into a sort of lagoon where rented rowboats circled casually. Julie threw out more bread, and the geese came in low over the water.

"On your left, that red boat is a real Chinese junk, brought over here five years ago from Hong Kong. The other yachts and power boats are all . . ."

Julie continued her spiel, her eyes roaming over the passengers. They were a typical summer crowd—kids, tourists, conventioners, Americans from across the lake, French-Canadians down from Montreal. One man in an aisle seat halfway back looked familiar and she thought she remembered him from an earlier trip.

At the wheel, Tom Haining eyed the feeding birds. "They're all out today," he commented. "I wonder what would happen if we came across without bread sometime."

"You'd have a lot of disappointed birds."

They cleared the last of the island passages and started slowly back across the choppy waters of the harbor. "Ladies and gentlemen, off to our right you'll notice a regatta from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club assembling for a race. Races are almost a daily event here during the good summer weather. In the winter, of course, the harbor generally freezes over—though they try to keep open a passage for the few year-round island residents. Years ago, some of the park land was eased for private homes, though it's gradually being reclaimed for public use."

The tour boat pulled into the dock at the foot of Yonge Street and Julie and Tom helped the passengers disembark. The group for the next trip was already in line, but there was time for a few minutes' break. When the last of the passengers was off the boat, Julie grabbed up her purse and headed for the ladies' room on the dock. She might have time for a quick cigarette.

"Pardon me," a man's voice said.

Julie glanced back and saw that it was the man she'd noticed on the boat. "Yes?" she asked with her best girl-guide smile. People often came to her with questions after the trip was over.

"That's a fascinating ride," he said. "I enjoyed it so much I took it twice."

"I'm glad you liked it."

He was tall, with a handsome tanned face and a twinkle in his eyes that had the contradictory effect of alerting Julie while putting her at ease. She'd met his type before and wasn't at all surprised when he said, "I'd like to talk to you about the harbor and the islands. They fascinate me and you must know as much as anyone. Would you join me for a drink after you go off duty?"

She'd said no to such offers a hundred times in the past, but once or twice she'd accepted—it had depended on her mood of the moment and the way the offer was presented. "Sure," she said after a moment's thought, "I guess I could, if you don't mind waiting while I make one more trip across. Then I'm through for the day."

"Fine. I'll meet you here in an hour then. My name is Phil Winters."

"I'm Julie Calmer."

On the next trip across she found herself wondering if she'd done the right thing accepting the date. She knew that such casual invita-

tions could lead to problems. Last summer she'd had a couple of dates with a college boy a few years younger than herself, and when she'd tried to break it off he had taken to turning up on the dock every day, attempting to talk to her. But Phil Winters was older and obviously more experienced. He didn't seem the type for permanent attachments.

It seemed like a safe enough evening.

He took her to the cocktail lounge of a nearby luxury hotel that towered over the harbor. He wore a tan jacket over his knit shirt and jeans, and it gave him a casual air that wasn't out of place in the surroundings. He looked like a wealthy young lawyer or broker, and maybe he was.

"Great view from here," he observed, looking out at the harbor. "We can see your tour boats. Or do they run at night?"

"The last trip is at eight in the summer. It gets back just before nine, while it's still light." She smiled and took out a cigarette. He reached over to light it for her. "You wanted to ask me about the islands."

"I do, but you interest me too. If you'll pardon my saying so, you look a little past college age and I thought most of the guides were college girls."

"The extra summer ones are, but I've been working since the season started in April. In the spring, boat tours go till four every day. I left college a year ago and worked the boats last summer. During the winter I didn't do much of anything. This year I'm back on the boats."

"You were in college a year ago?"

"It was a half-hearted attempt to earn a master's degree. I gave it up. Maybe you're right about my being too old for college. I'm twenty-six."

"I think you're a lovely young woman. Are you American?"

"I was born in Canada, but we lived in Cleveland while I was growing up. I came back here to attend college and decided to stay." She sipped her drink. "What about you, Mr. Winters?"

"Oh, I've lived an ordinary life. I *am* American—I came over as a draft-dodger, went back home during the amnesty, then chucked it all and came back here again. Now I'm thirty years' old and sort of back where I started."

"You have an extraordinary tan."

"I do a little sailing. A friend of mine has a yacht and I go out with him on weekends."

"What do you do the rest of the time?"

"This and that." He shrugged. "Marketing, mostly."

After their drinks they had dinner, and Julie found herself enjoying him more than she had any other man since Glen. She found herself telling him about Glen, about living with him through last autumn, and about the row they'd had on Christmas Eve that ended it all.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

They ended the evening back at her apartment and in the morning he helped her with breakfast. "What time do you have to be to work?" he asked.

"Not till noon today."

"Good. You know, I never did ask you those questions about the islands."

She grinned impishly.

She saw Phil Winters every night that week, and he stayed with her every night but Friday, when he left at ten to attend to some unexplained business. She wondered vaguely if he was dealing in narcotics, because on the second night he'd produced two joints of pot and they'd lit up.

"What do you do for a living, Phil?" she asked him on Saturday.

"I told you. I'm in marketing."

"That pot the other night was a good grade. Do you sell it?"

He laughed. "I wish I did! There's good money in it."

He rode the tour boat again the next afternoon, telling her that he liked hearing her voice as she gave her lecture. Afterwards, he asked about the loaves of bread for the birds. "We get it cheap," she explained. "It's day-old bread that the bakery sells us. It's perfectly good for the birds. Probably for people too, for that matter."

"Throwing that bread to the birds fascinates me. There's a trick I'd like to try sometime."

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you later. Let's go home now."

Home had come to mean her apartment, and in the space of a week he'd managed to move in his razor, toothbrush, and several items of

clothing. He explained that he'd been living with someone who was into hard drugs and it had gotten to be a bad scene. Julie suspected the someone might be a girl, but she liked him moving in and didn't really care how it had come about.

They spent Sunday at the apartment and wandering around downtown Toronto. The city never ceased to fascinate her, with its fountains and plazas and endless shopping arcades.

She worked a six-day week in the summer. When she returned to the apartment on Monday night, Phil had a surprise. "Look," he said, dumping the contents of a paper bag on the table.

"A bag full of cheese sandwiches?"

"They look like it, don't they? Two slices of bread with a couple of pieces of Swiss cheese in between. There's even a bite taken out of one side. But notice—inside the bitten-out part is the neck of a three-ounce plastic bottle."

She poked gingerly with one finger. "It feels like a plastic sponge."

"That's just what it is. It's a cheese-sandwich flask for secret drinkers and wags—perfect for football games or lunch at the office."

"They sell these?"

"Sure—in novelty and souvenir shops."

"But what are you doing with a dozen of them?"

"That's part of my idea," Phil told her. "It's a joke, really. See, the layers are just glued together. I can pull them apart, remove the imitation cheese, and glue the two pieces of make-believe bread back together again. I can even glue another little piece of the bread over this bitten-out place. Now it looks like two pieces of bread, but with the plastic bottle hidden inside."

"Seems like a lot of work when you could do the same thing with two pieces of real bread."

He grinned at her. "The birds would eat real bread."

Then she understood that he wanted her to do something with the phony bread—something connected with feeding the birds. "Oh, Phil, no," she said. "I can't—"

"Sure you can! It's just a little gag. A friend of mine will have one of those rented boats out in the lagoon near the amusement park. You have this piece of bread in with all the rest and you just toss it into the water near his boat. The birds won't eat it and he'll pick it up."

She stared at him uncertainly. "What will be inside?"

"Nothing—I swear to you! I just want to see if it will work."

"Suppose it doesn't float?"

"It'll float. I already tried it in the sink."

"You're not getting me into trouble, are you?"

"Look at it yourself—the plastic container is empty! It's just a gag."

"You keep saying that, but I don't see any special humor in it."

"Just do it for me, will you?"

If she had no reason to do it, she had no real reason to decline. It seemed harmless enough.

"How will I know your friend's boat?"

"They're all numbered. He'll have number 15—and he'll be wearing a red shirt."

"Which trip?"

"The first one—tomorrow noon."

It was a hot and hazy day and the noon trip across had a full load of passengers. Tom Haining was chatting with her, so that when they reached the first of the birds she almost forgot about the special bread in her purse. But then as Tom maneuvered the boat under the pedestrian bridge she saw the man in the red shirt dead ahead, sitting serenely in one of the little rowboats. He was much older than she'd expected, obviously not a contemporary of Phil's. There was something hard about his features that made him look distinctly out of place in a rowboat on a summer's afternoon. She tossed out the fake bread along with a couple of real slices and it landed together in the water near his boat. The ducks and geese attacked it at once, but abandoned the false bread after a few frustrating pecks. As her boat made a curve out of sight, she saw the man in the red shirt reach into the water and retrieve it.

Phil Winters was waiting for her back on the dock. "How'd it go?"

She shrugged. "He picked it up. I guess it went O.K."

"Great. I'll see you back at the apartment tonight."

"Phil?"

"Yes?"

"Who is that man?"

"Just a guy I do business with."

That night he brought her a bottle of expensive wine and he seemed in especially good spirits. "Are you going to tell me about that business today?" she asked him as they sat down to eat.

"There's nothing to tell." He got up from the table and went to his jacket. Inside a plastic sandwich bag was another of the spongelike sandwiches. "Will you do it again tomorrow?" he asked.

She took it in her hand and was immediately aware that it was heavier than the first one. "What's inside the plastic bottle?"

"Nothing that need concern you."

She opened it and spilled a little of the powdery contents onto the tablecloth. "What is it, Phil?"

"A few ounces of cocaine, that's all."

"My God—what do you take me for?"

"You smoked pot with me. This is no worse."

"It's a lot worse, Phil, and you know it! Are you selling the stuff?"

"I'm delivering it, to the man in the boat. It's no big deal, but we're afraid of the police."

"How much is this worth?"

He didn't answer until she repeated the question. "The current street value is about \$1200 an ounce."

"Look, I don't care what you do—but you can do it without me! I don't want any part of it."

"You made one delivery already."

"It was empty."

"But if the police were watching my friend they don't know that. Don't you see, Julie—you've already taken the risk! If anything was wrong with the scheme we'd know it by now!"

"Can't you put it in a locker at the bus station? Or mail it to him?"

He shook his head. "I need a middleman I can trust. I need you, Julie."

"I'm not a man, middle or otherwise. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"I noticed."

"Answer me something honestly, Phil. Is this why you picked me up in the first place?"

"No! I swear it wasn't, Julie! I didn't get the idea till a couple of days ago!"

The day was overcast, with forecasts of scattered thundershowers.

Julie delivered her talk without visible nervousness and threw the bread to the birds easily, casually. She chatted with the passengers up front and helped guide Tom under the pedestrian bridge. When she saw the man in the red shirt she tossed the fake bread in his direction without thinking twice. This time she didn't even look back.

Just this one more time, Phil had told her.

But she remembered that he'd bought a dozen of the spongy foam sandwiches.

When he asked her again two days later, she offered only token resistance. She was into it now, she knew, and it was best not thinking about it.

A week later, after she'd made three successful deliveries, Tom Haining said to her, "You know, there's a guy in a red shirt who's out there in a rowboat almost every day—always on the noon trip."

"Maybe he likes the exercise," she suggested.

"But why would he wear the same-color shirt every day?"

That night when she returned to the apartment, she told Phil, "Have your man wear different-color shirts from now on. My skipper is noticing him."

"He wears red so you can spot him easily."

"I can spot him. I'm beginning to see his face in my dreams."

The next afternoon the man in the rowboat was wearing a yellow shirt. Tom Haining didn't seem to notice him.

Julie had stopped looking inside the plastic bottles after the first couple of times. When Phil gave her each day's delivery, she rarely looked at it. When the day for the eleventh delivery came, she commented, "You must be out of sandwiches. This makes eleven and we used one for the test."

"I've got good news for you, Julie," he said. "This is the last one. After tomorrow I'm retiring from the business."

"Really?"

"Really." He took out his wallet and handed her five \$100 bills. "This is for you. It's your share."

She didn't touch the bills. "Phil, I didn't do it for money."

"But you should have it. I'm getting money for deliveries you're making."

"I've told you since the beginning that you could have delivered it in a dozen other ways. You don't need me. You never needed me."

"I need you, Julie. Will you believe that?"

And she did believe him. She couldn't bring herself to not believe him, to admit that it had all been a game with him from the beginning. In the end she put the money in her purse. She could always decide what to do with it later.

The next day the man was waiting in his boat as usual. This time he was wearing a plaid shirt, and she threw the bread with a little extra vigor, knowing it would be the last time. The Canada geese and the swans and the gulls swooped in to the attack, plunging their beaks into the real bread almost before it touched the water. The man in the plaid shirt leaned forward to fish his prize from the swelling wake of their craft. Hadn't anyone else ever noticed him in all these days, she wondered, battling the birds for his strange prize?

The final delivery had seemed a bit heavier than the others, and she looked back to make sure it hadn't sunk. Which was why she was watching when the flash of flame enveloped the rowboat and the sickening thud of the explosion swept over them.

She waited in horror for the smoke to clear as Tom Haining wrestled the wheel against the swells of water from the blast. Some women in the back were screaming in panic without really knowing what had happened.

Only Julie knew for sure, and hers was the greatest panic.

"It was a bomb, all right," Tom Haining said as he brought the tour boat back to its dock at the foot of Yonge Street.

"Tom, I'm not feeling well. That was too much for me. I'm going to take the rest of the day off."

"You *don't* look good, Julie. Tell them at the office to call in one of the other girls. We can skip a trip till she gets here."

"Thanks. I'll see you tomorrow."

She went back to the apartment, wondering what she would find.

She found nothing.

His clothes were gone from the closet. Every evidence that he'd ever existed had been wiped away. She had to face the fact that he'd been using her from the beginning, setting up an elaborate plot by which she would deliver first cocaine and finally a bomb to the unnamed man in the rowboat.

He'd never loved her.

And when the police started backtracking from the explosion in the rowboat, the trail would end with her. She didn't know where Phil Winters lived or even if that was his real name.

She got out the phonebook and found two dozen listings under Winters but not a single Philip or Phil or P.

The trail ended with her. She'd been delivering the cocaine—and even had a five-hundred-dollar payment in her purse at that moment.

There was no Phil Winters, not any longer. There was only Julie Calmer, who'd just murdered a man.

She started to shake uncontrollably.

She went to the window, threw it open, and stared down at the traffic on Bloor Street ten floors below.

In that moment she was closer to killing herself than she'd ever realized possible.

Then she closed the window and decided to kill Phil Winters instead.

That night she went out to a bar alone for the first time in months. It was a bar near her apartment where she and Phil had sometimes stopped for a drink. But he wasn't there, and the bartender knew him only as a friend of hers.

She began to realize how little she knew of this man who had shared her life so intimately for nearly a month. He'd been a phantom even when he was in her arms.

The next morning Tom Haining was waiting for her on the dock. "There's a detective here wants to talk to you, Julie. About what happened yesterday."

"Why? I don't know anything about it."

"It's only routine, Julie," he said, and she thought she could read some sort of warning in his eyes.

The detective was a tall slim man wearing a light blue summer suit. His name was Sergeant MacKenzie and he spoke with a trace of accent that could have been Irish or Scotch. "I'm working on the bombing," he said by way of introduction. "We've identified the dead man as a drug pusher named Arnie Newmark. Does the name mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," she answered honestly. "I never heard it before."

"Odd sort of case. The man who rents the boats out on the island

says Arnie was a regular customer. He came out every couple of days, apparently on the ferry, and rented a rowboat. He always came right at noon, and he always wanted boat number 15. That wasn't hard because business is slack that early in the day. But it was curious enough so that the man started watching Arnie. Seems he stayed out every time till just after your tour boat passed."

"Oh?"

Sergeant MacKenzie nodded. "A couple of times the boatman saw him take something from the water after you passed by. We think maybe it was narcotics."

"How could that be?"

"Someone who regularly rode your boat could toss out bottles or packages that would float. Then yesterday they could have substituted some plastic explosive and a detonator for the narcotics. The package might have felt a little heavy to Arnie so he tried opening it right away and blew himself up."

Julie's mouth was very dry. "You mean you think someone on the boat did it?"

"It's a strong possibility. That's why I wanted to talk to the skipper and you, to see if you remembered any passengers who regularly took the noon tour."

"No," she managed to reply, "I don't remember anyone."

"And you think you would if it had been the same person every couple of days?"

"I think so."

He nodded as if she'd confirmed what he'd thought all along. "I guess that's all I need to ask you, Miss Calmer. Thank you."

"Tell me—why do you think anyone would want to kill this man Newmark?"

"These people are always falling out among themselves. It might have been a dispute over the payoff, or about how much the drugs were being cut before their street sale."

"It's terrible."

"Have you ever tried drugs, Miss Calmer?"

"What makes you ask that?"

He shrugged. "A great many people your age do."

"Well, I've smoked pot. But I've never tried cocaine."

"No," he said. "I thought not. Well, thank you again."

She watched him until he was out of sight around the corner, then she went out on the dock to where Tom Haining stood near the *Island Queen*.

"How'd you make out?" he asked.

"All right. As you said, it was just routine."

When the noon boat pulled out, there were already a hundred people in line for the next trip. Everyone wanted to see the place where the bomb had gone off. Julie tried to give her usual performance, but she knew it wasn't coming off. Once or twice Tom shot her an odd look, especially when she faltered as they were going under the island bridge. It was almost as if she expected to see Arnie Newmark back in his rowboat again, waiting for her to kill him again.

She shuddered at the thought, and Tom Haining put out a hand to steady her. He took the nearest loaf of bread and began throwing slices to the waiting birds.

When they returned to the dock, he watched her helping the passengers off the boat. Then, after they were alone, he asked in his quiet voice, "Is there anything I can do, Julie?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know you're involved in this somehow. I've suspected for some time that you were throwing something into the water with the bread. But I can't believe you'd kill anyone, Julie."

"I don't want to talk about it," she said, turning away.

"I saw you a couple of times with George Kozit. I hope you're not involved with him."

"Who?"

"Kozit. He took a couple of trips with us last month—and I saw you one night having a drink with him. He doesn't know me, but my kid brother got involved with him a few years back. He's no good, Julie. If he's involved in this somehow, you should tell the police everything."

George Kozit.

Phil Winters was George Kozit.

There was only one Kozit listed in the Toronto phonebook, and it wasn't George. She went to the address anyway and found a woman in her thirties whose blonde hair was dry from too much bleach.

"Sure—George is my brother," she said. "What about him?"

"I have to find him. It's very important."

"You pregnant or something?"

Julie felt herself flushing. "No. But it's very important."

"I haven't seen George in months. I don't even know if he's still in town."

"Where was he living the last you knew?"

The woman put her hand on her hip and looked Julie up and down. "My brother always had a weakness for women like you."

"Where was he living?" Julie repeated.

"Oh, hell, he was rooming with a fellow named Sweet out near Scarborough. Here, I'll give you the address, then get lost."

It was dark by the time Julie found the address in Scarborough. It was an older house that had been converted into apartments, and the mailbox listed Sweet in the second-floor rear. She pushed the buzzer in the dim downstairs hallway and waited.

Nothing happened.

She pushed the buzzer again.

This time she heard a door open somewhere above her. A voice called down, "Who's there?"

It was Phil.

She started up the steps without answering.

"Is that you, Sweet?" he asked.

She saw him when she reached the top of the stairs, silhouetted against the light from the room behind him.

"Hello, Phil," she said quietly.

"Julie! What in hell are you doing here?"

"I had a hard time finding you."

She walked past him into the lighted apartment and he followed, closing the door. "I didn't run out on you, if that's what you think. But when I heard about the explosion I knew there'd be lots of cops around."

She turned to face him, surprised at how completely the love she'd felt had drained away. "When you *heard* about the explosion? You *caused* the explosion, Phil! You made me kill that man!"

"Calm down, will you?"

"It was all a game with you, wasn't it? And I was stupid enough to do whatever you asked!"

"Julie—"

"You're not even Phil Winters! You're George Kozit!"

His face hardened at the sound of his name. "How'd you find me, Julie?"

She fumbled with her purse, pulling out the sharp-bladed steak knife she'd hidden there. Her eyes were beginning to blur with tears. "I swore I'd kill you, Phil, for what you did to that man, and to me! I found you and I came here to kill you—but now I can't!" She hurled the knife to the floor at his feet. "You made me a killer, but I could never kill anyone—not even you."

He stooped to pick up the knife. "Julie, you have to understand. I had a business arrangement with that man Newmark. He did some things I didn't like so the partnership had to be dissolved. I realize now I shouldn't have involved you in it. That was a bad mistake and I'm sorry."

"Sorry! A man is *dead*!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I'm going to tell the police everything—that's what I'm going to *do*!"

"You'll go to jail along with me," he said quietly. "It won't be pleasant there."

"I don't care any more!"

He took a step toward her, and she saw the steak knife in his hand. "When you stop caring, it's the same as dying, Julie."

She turned and tried to run for the door, but he grabbed her and pulled her back. She screamed and the knife was at her throat and she screamed again and knew she was going to die.

There was a great deal of noise in the room. She was on the floor with someone bending over her and she recognized the face of the detective, Sergeant MacKenzie.

"You'll be all right," he said. "Lie still. He didn't cut you bad."

She lifted her head and saw Phil across the room in the grip of another detective. "How did you get here?" she asked MacKenzie.

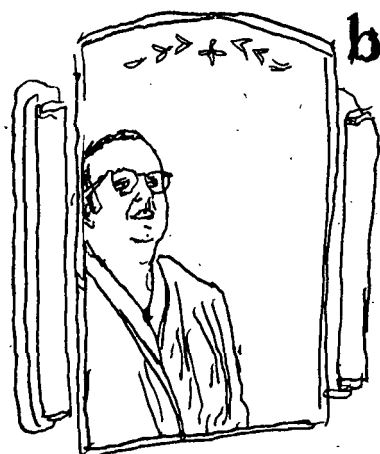
"We've been following you all day. When I talked to you you mentioned cocaine. I hadn't said anything about cocaine. That was enough to make me suspicious."

"I'm so glad."

"We have a great deal to ask you."

She looked over at Phil and said, "I have a great deal to tell."

To each his own moment of triumph . . .



by John Lutz

One man's manual



There are experiences that change men's lives, and David Blout was sure that he'd undergone such an experience when he turned the last page of *Triumph Through Toughness*. He'd begun the book after dinner, lying on the sofa with his shoes off, his stereo turned to high volume so that the sound of his popular-music tapes permeated the small tenth-floor apartment.

But within five minutes Blout became oblivious to the pulsating mu-

sic, so engrossed was he in *Triumph Through Toughness*, advertised as "the indispensable manual for the realistic rising businessman." Here was a book Blout could sink his teeth into, chew, and digest. The author, Sternn Moxie, a successful real-estate broker, was a man much like Blout wanted to become—moneyed, hard-driving, pragmatic, a man on top, on the very apex. And in straightforward language Sternn Moxie through his book was telling Blout how to emulate that success. And Blout was listening.

Five loud evenly spaced knocks on the apartment door broke through Blout's reverie like muffled gunshots.

Blout placed the book on the coffee table and went to the door.

His neighbor in 10-D, Sam Milquist, was standing in the hall preparing to knock again. As the door swung inward, Milquist's upraised fist opened like a rose and he lowered his arm. He was about Blout's age, thirty-six, but shorter, with defeated blue eyes. He was balding and apparently putting up no struggle against middle-aged fat.

"Your stereo," he said to Blout, his round, tentatively smiling face gleaming with beads of perspiration. "I'd appreciate it if you'd turn it down. It's late and I have to get up early tomorrow for work. . ."

"Sure," Blout said curtly, and shut the door. He didn't want trouble with his neighbors, but he was tired of Milquist's complaints about his music.

But when he stood before the stereo, Blout's hand stopped a few inches from the volume-control knob. Did Milquist think he was in charge of the tenth floor? Blout paid his rent. He had as much right to live as he pleased as Milquist. More, maybe, considering he'd been a tenant longer.

Turning his back on the still-blaring stereo, Blout went back to the sofa and picked up his book. He thumbed through the pages to Section Three, "Victory Through Intimidation—The Art of Instilling Fear."

Blout read it over again to the rhythmic blasting of the stereo. There were no more knocks on the door. His faith in Sternn Moxie's book expanded.

When he finally went to bed, Blout marveled at how fate was favoring him. *Triumph Through Toughness* couldn't have entered his life at a more advantageous time. He was in the running for the new south-east district manager's job at Colfarr Container. The company's higher-ups were observing both Blout and Will Tremain, trying to de-

termine which of the two men would be best for the managerial job. The incline to success was slippery, with room for only a select few. It was rumored that the man not chosen for the job would get the ax, with the economy what it was. But Blout was suddenly confident now that the job would be his.

"Morning," Will Tremain said to Blout the next day on the elevator.

Blout didn't answer him. Let him stew. Let him begin to wonder just how important he really was.

When the two men left the elevator, Blout was pleased to notice the faintly puzzled expression on Tremain's blandly pleasant features. Sternn Moxie had described that expression (Chapt. 2) as the first sign that a rival had been knocked off balance.

At lunchtime that day Blout waited until it was almost time for Tremain to return before leaving himself. He went to the restaurant where Tremain usually ate, walked past his rival's table with a casual wave of his hand, and took a table in the more expensive dining room beyond, where Tremain could see him. Blout ordered a martini and sat sipping it, glancing now and then at his watch as if waiting for someone. He knew Tremain had a 1:30 appointment and would soon have to leave, not knowing for whom Blout was waiting. And when Tremain was gone, Blout would cross back to the lower-rate dining room and order a sandwich.

But apparently, Tremain hadn't read Sternn Moxie's best-seller. He rose from his chair and walked toward Blout, smiling. Blout was careful not to return the smile.

"David," Tremain said through his widening smile, "who are you waiting for?"

"Oh. A friend. . ."

"Listen, you didn't speak to me in the elevator this morning. I hope nothing's wrong."

"No, Will, I guess I just didn't hear you."

This wouldn't do! Tremain was standing and Blout was sitting. Blout stood up, holding his drink.

"You leaving?"

"Afraid so."

Blout made a point of staring at Tremain's tie, on which there was a gravy spot. Tremain seemed not to notice, or not to care.

"What about your friend?"

"He'll have to make it some other time," Blout said, finishing his drink. "See you back at the office."

Blout left the restaurant ahead of Tremain, and they walked to where Blout had been careful to park next to Tremain's car. Blout's was a newer car, recently waxed. Without a word to Tremain, Blout got into his shining sedan and drove from the parking lot. He was glad his car was royal blue—a power color.

When Blout reached his apartment door that evening, tired and not in the best humor, Sam Milquist stepped from his adjoining apartment, buttoning his wrinkled suitcoat. He gave Blout a self-conscious sideways glance and hurried toward the elevator.

"Milquist," Blout said, so softly that he might not have spoken.

By the time Milquist had turned, Blout was stepping inside his apartment and shutting the door, feeling better.

That night Blout again studied Section Three of *Triumph Through Toughness*, marveling anew at its simplicity and practicality. Eventually Tremain would have to be affected by the techniques Blout was applying. Stern Moxie was careful to point out (Chapt. 6) that certain types sometimes took longer to break.

But in the meantime the situation annoyed Blout. When he heard the muted sounds of Sam Milquist's return, he turned up the volume on his stereo. A doormat like Milquist was living proof (if you wanted to call that living) that the book's techniques worked. Basically Tremain was a sensitive quiet sort like Milquist. Deep inside they were all the same (Chapt. 4). Blout went to sleep that night confident that time was all he needed to accomplish his goal.

He got the opportunity to try more of Section Three's techniques the next day in Tremain's office, where the regional general manager was going to give the two candidates instructions for a dual research project. Ostensibly the assignment was to reduce by half the possibility of human error, but Blout knew that the man who turned in the most impressive report would in all likelihood secure the new Southeast Division managerial position.

The regional manager was late for the meeting, and Blout politely refused Tremain's invitation to sit down. Instead he paced slowly, al-

most absently, glancing down at a sharp angle from time to time at the seated Tremain.

Tremain seemed unconcerned, completely at ease. "I understand," he said, "we're to examine ways to increase the bursting test strength of the new heavy-duty container without adding to production costs."

"I can think of several possibilities offhand," Blout said—so softly that Tremain would have to strain to hear.

"Speak up, will you, Dave?" Tremain said amiably.

The man was maddening! Blout felt a cold rage—he wanted Tremain to hate him, to be afraid of him!

When the regional general manager, an imposing grey-haired man named Rogers, came into the office, Blout treated him with respect, but at the same time in a manner that made it plain that he, Blout, felt that he was Rogers' equal (Chapt. 9). Rogers seemed not to notice.

The bursting test reports were what was required. All through Rogers' instructions Blout kept his "dominant glare" trained on Tremain, whose bland features registered more puzzlement than submissiveness.

"Blout," Rogers said suddenly, "are you listening?"

"Yes, sir! Certainly!" Blout countered. It was difficult to concentrate on both the dominant glare and what Rogers was saying. Just as he'd feared. Not enough practice before the mirror. And Tremain was smiling—at least he seemed to be smiling. Frustration grabbed like a claw at Blout's stomach. He took work home that night.

Most of the evening his thoughts were concentrated on cardboard thicknesses, corrugation patterns, cubic inches, and stress factors. Finally he decided that the answer was to reduce the size of the side cardboard flaps while increasing that of the end flaps. According to Engineering, that was possible.

When his eyes ached from studying fine print and his head throbbed with a dull but persistent pain, Blout set aside his work and lay down to relax to his favorite music. But he kept thinking of Tremain, the imperturbable, infuriatingly unconcerned Tremain.

The knocking on the door couldn't overpower the beating bass rhythm that pulsed like a mad heartbeat through the apartment. Blout ignored the knocking with a certain pleasure.

But he couldn't ignore the telephone. Cursing, he rose from the sofa on the sixth ring and plucked the receiver from its cradle, disgusted with himself when he heard Sam Milquist's diffident voice on the line.

"Mr. Blout, you didn't answer my knock. Please, you've got to turn down the music. I have to sleep. . . I'm under a great strain. . . My entire family isn't well. My brother's in the hospital. . ."

Blout became encouraged by the cringing quality in Milquist's voice. Stern Moxie's methods certainly worked on him. Milquist seemed not only respectful but in petrifying fear of Blout.

"I'm not interested in your family problems or in who's in the hospital," Blout said testily.

"I don't expect you to be. But the noise. . ."

"Oh, all right, Milquist, I'll turn it down." This was the "agree and anger" ploy (Chapt. 7). Blout replaced the receiver without saying goodbye and returned to stretch out again on the sofa, the stereo volume unchanged. The apartment manager was on vacation, and Milquist didn't have the nerve to phone the police.

Blout fell asleep on the sofa.

He awoke at four A.M. with the stereo still blaring; it had automatically replayed dozens of times the last cassette he'd inserted, "Drummers Wild." Milquist hadn't phoned again—or if he had, Blout hadn't heard him.

By chance, Blout and Milquist were alone in the descending elevator in the morning. Milquist appeared unhealthy, with dark circles under his sad eyes and a waxy pallor to his face. He refused to look at Blout, who never averted his gaze from him. Blout knew there was nothing to fear from Milquist physically; the Milquists, the Tremains of this world were simply not the sort to be capable of physical violence except in their fantasies (Chapt. 8). The real world belonged to the fearless, the takers, and Blout was one of those.

Milquist was an interesting and therapeutic exercise for Blout, but it was Tremain who was important—and he somehow refused to become intimidated by Blout's techniques.

Later that week, the evening before the bursting test reports were due, Blout worked late at Colfarr Container, and when everyone else on his floor had left he used a plastic credit card to let himself into Tremain's office. His breathing was loud, like escaping steam, and his heart pounded with an exhilarating rhythm as he searched Tremain's desk. This was "reasonable reconnaissance" (Chapt. 5), and Blout knew that Tremain would have surreptitiously entered his, Blout's, office if

he had the nerve. Crime paid, and the clever and audacious collected.

Blout found the bursting test report in a middle drawer. He scanned it quickly. Tremain's solution to the container problem was the use of a different type of glue on the flaps and a rougher-textured cardboard. It was a more economical solution than Blout's—costs would actually be cut.

After only a second's hesitation, Blout carried the lengthy, complex report to his own office, altered a few figures, then returned it to Tremain's desk drawer.

Blout returned home in a cheerful frame of mind that night. He practiced his dominant glare before the medicine-cabinet mirror for a while, then decided to have dinner out.

After a shower, he changed into casual clothes and left the apartment, leaving his stereo playing to discourage burglars.

The next day Rogers informed Blout that the Southeast District Manager's job was his. Rogers shook Blout's hand. He treated him as an equal. Section Three had proved prophetic.

Tremain seemed philosophical about the selection, his disappointment held in careful check. Blout didn't feel sorry for him; the weak were unworthy of pity. Sometime in their lives they had made a conscious or unconscious choice to be as they were. They were the necessary casualties over which men like Blout climbed to eminence.

Blout seldom drank to excess, but that night he had cause for celebration. Near his apartment there was a dim but respectable lounge where he'd stopped a few times with friends. Tonight he drank there alone, and not until he made his unsteady way home did he realize he'd drunk too much.

There was something brittle—broken glass?—on the hall carpet outside his apartment door, Blout noticed, when he inserted his key in the lock on the third try.

Once inside, Blout was startled out of his alcoholic daze. The hand-worked cabinet of his expensive stereo system was splintered, smashed. Cracked tape cassettes were strewn about the floor. The imported turntable lay bent like a junkyard tin-can lid. Blout swayed, clenched his fists, stared unbelievably.

"It was the only way I had left," an apologetic voice said behind him.

Blout turned away from the wreckage of his stereo to see Sam Milquist sitting rigidly on the edge of the sofa, his hands folded in his lap.

"I didn't want this," Milquist continued. "I'm not a violent person. . .but I'm not well. Schizophrenia runs in my family. You made me afraid of you, made me hate you, forced me to resort to this. . ."

The alcohol Blout had drunk was suddenly sour in his stomach, and the black bile of anger rose, choking him. He took a heavy deliberate step toward the seated Milquist. "You little marshmallow, you'll pay for this!" he cried. "By God, you'll pay!"

"I'm afraid *you'll* pay," Milquist corrected him politely in a firm voice not at all like his own. Smiling jauntily, he stood and raised the emergency fire ax he'd taken from the shattered glass case in the hall.

Blout stood gaping at his set intense face, at the long-handled ax as it descended, parting the air with the dread whisper of impending death. And in that instant of incredible calm, he remembered the layman's term for schizophrenia—split personality—and he wondered what Stern Moxie would have to say about this.

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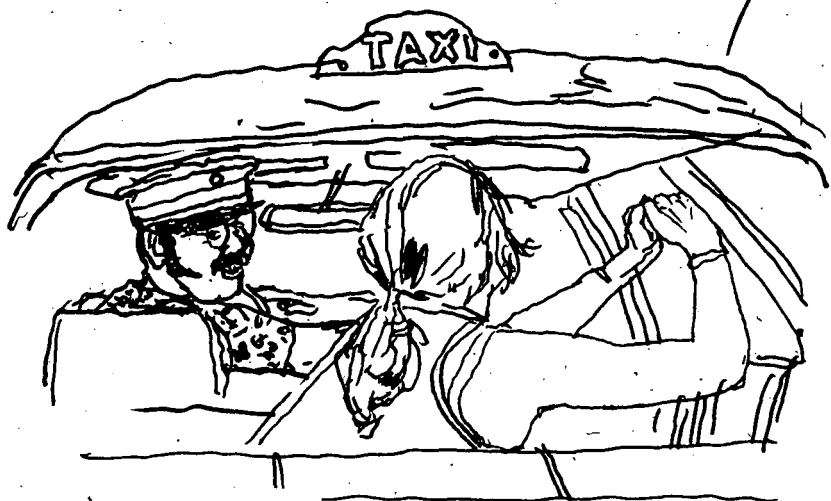
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Can happenings on a sunny summer day properly be called nightmare? . . .



THE EXORCISM

BY TONITA S. GARDNER

The brochure had described it as "Your Enchanted Second Honeymoon: Sun-filled days. Fun-filled nights." But for Lisa Maxton, so run-down that she arrived on vacation with a bad case of flu, the entire trip was a disillusionment. And then—their last night on the island—there was the dream.

In it, she and Jordan were just starting for home after their week-long stay on St. Katrina. They were in an ancient taxicab, half their

luggage stowed on top of its rattly 1950's roof, the rest wedged into its misshapen trunk and tied there by a length of cord. The taxi was headed for the pier. Although she'd never seen the S.S. *Seafarer* except in pictures, every detail of its twin-stacked bulk loomed invitingly ahead of them as they rode through the tropical Gauguin-landscape with its bronze and scarlet flowering trees and its skyscraping coconut palms, their mobile fronds arched into giant-sized umbrellas. They were early. She leaned against Jordan in the back seat. She felt rested, completely relaxed. She was also a flattering pinkish-tan, not nearly as fragile-looking as she'd been for the past few months, and in the dream she felt as happy as if the loss of their baby had never taken place.

"Look, Jordan," she said as they passed a row of small thatch-roofed stores that, miragelike, suddenly appeared out of nowhere, "we never even saw this little shopping area."

Signaling the driver to pull over, he reached into his pocket. "Why don't you browse around here for fifteen minutes or so and then meet me back at the ship? It's only a few blocks away." He handed her a ten-dollar bill.

"Can't you come with me?" she asked.

"Hardly," he said, jerking his thumb at the roof of the cab where their luggage had bounced precariously above their heads. Then, lowering his voice, he said, "What's to stop the driver from disappearing with all our things?"

"You're right," she told him. "I'll meet you at the dock as soon as I'm finished."

She got out of the cab and entered the first store. It was a charming little place, almost doll-sized, and she exclaimed in delight over the selection of miniature shell necklaces, each of them in soft iridescent colors, no two of them exactly alike. After purchasing several strands from a clerk whose shiny gold hoop earrings matched the fillings in her front teeth, she went to the next store. There she started to examine some lovely hand-embroidered baby dresses in sheer wool and lustrous silk and then recoiled, berating herself for being a masochist. The baby had been stillborn. And before that she'd had more miscarriages than she cared to remember. So many, in fact, that before her last pregnancy Jordan had pleaded with her to give her body a chance to recuperate. "Why rush to have a baby?" he'd said. "It's ridiculous for you to turn yourself into an invalid."

But of course she hadn't listened to him. Now, on doctor's orders, she had no choice. So what need did she have for baby dresses? She hurried next door and found herself in a straw market. There were baskets of all shapes and sizes, many of them woven into elaborate designs. She picked up a small bread-basket but discovered another she liked better and replaced the first. She kept on looking through piles of merchandise stacked on shelves, on tables, and on the floor, and soon came across a third one which she then exchanged for the second. Each time she proceeded toward the back of the store it seemed to grow, one little room leading into another like a series of intricate Chinese puzzle boxes. Finally she came to the last one. She found a basket with a braided handle that she couldn't resist. She looked at the price: it was three-fifty, and well worth it. She paid the smiling black woman who stood near an old cash register that had been repainted a brilliant Day-Glow green, and tucked her previous purchases inside the basket. She still had a dollar left over. Did she have time to buy something else? She glanced at her watch. She'd been shopping for three-quarters of an hour! Somehow, as she'd wandered through the ever-increasing multitude of rooms, her allotted quarter of an hour had expanded until, in a panic, she realized that the ship would be departing in less than ten minutes. If she ran she might make it but she couldn't run. She no longer had the strength. She emerged from the store and stood on the worn cobblestone sidewalk. It was very warm but she was shivering. She pictured the ship pulling away and leaving her behind on this isolated patch of island. And then the thought occurred to her that maybe that was exactly what Jordan wanted. She was no good to him. She couldn't even give him a baby.

"Taxi, Ma'am?" A decrepit old sedan, more ancient than the one that she and Jordan had just ridden in, suddenly stopped next to her.

She jumped into it with a muted outcry that was half relief, half fear, that she was already too late. "Take me to the pier," she said to the broad-shouldered black man in the front seat. "And hurry!" She fingered the dollar in her hand. Thank God she hadn't spent it. It was more than enough to get her where she had to go. Sitting on the edge of her seat, she stared out the open window, silently willing the cab to go faster and faster. The driver, as if reading her thoughts, obliged. But as they jolted along she found that the florid landscape had, at some point, begun to alter. Everything was now parched, the few palm

trees they passed drooping as if they'd been attacked by some predatory insect, or ravaged by a virulent tropical disease.

They pulled up to the dock. The ship was still there, but its horns were blasting and sailors in white T-shirts were already hauling at its ropes. She thrust the dollar at the driver's right hand, then quickly withdrew her own as she noticed that his index fingernail resembled a curved dagger several inches long. "Thank you," she said. "And keep the change." She reached for the door handle. It didn't move. The driver turned around, his face gleaming with sweat, his even teeth as smooth as the backs of miniature ivory dominoes.

"No, Ma'am, one dollar is not enough." He pointed to a rusty contraption that was ticking away to her left directly in back of his seat. He lowered a small lever. "Ma'am, the meter say seventeen dollars and ten cents."

"But that's absurd!" she protested. "It was no more than a quarter of a mile!"

"See for yourself, Ma'am," he said, shining a huge dented flashlight onto the unlighted meter and tapping it with the sharp point of his daggerlike nail.

She squinted at the meter. It did indeed read \$17.10. She slid along the seat and reached for the opposite door handle. "You obviously had that thing running way before I even got in here," she said, and pulled the handle. It didn't budge.

"Ma'am, you give me the money."

"I don't have seventeen dollars and ten cents," she said in a hoarse whisper. "Let me out of here!"

"No, Ma'am."

The ship's horns sounded again.

"I'll call the police."

"No police here, Ma'am."

She thrust her head out the open window, shading her eyes against the bright glare of the sun. He was right. There were no police—only some straw-hatted natives with pushcarts selling bruised bananas or spongy-looking yams to passersby, and two or three blind beggars with outstretched hands.

"Look, Mister—" she swallowed at the sourness that bubbled up from her stomach and burned her throat "—I'll have to get the money from my husband. I just don't have it."

"Ma'am, you bring your husband back here?"

"Yes! Yes!" she said, intending no such thing. But she had to get away from this maniac.

He reached back, and with one continuous motion his mammoth hand grabbed her basket, transferred it to the front seat, and then opened the back door. "I keep the basket, Ma'am, to make sure you come back with your husband."

She bounded out of the car. Let him keep the damn thing, she told herself. It was worth the price of the beads and the basket just to be rid of him. But as she hurried along, she was hit with a sickening realization—she had left her purse behind on the seat! Her driver's license, her keys, her medicine, everything!

Hysterical, she ran toward the gangplank. "Jordan! Jordan!" she screamed, ignoring the curious stares of the passengers who stood peering down at her from the ship's upper decks.

Suddenly Jordan was hurrying toward her. Breathlessly she explained what had happened. They rushed back to the taxi.

The driver was smiling at them like a malevolent croupier with a stacked deck of cards. "You give me the money, man. I give you the lady's pocketbook and the basket."

"You're a thief!" she shouted at him.

"Let me handle this," Jordan said as he steered her toward the gangplank. "Just get on board and tell them to hold up the ship for a few minutes. I'll be right there."

She started back. The gangplank was already going up. "Wait!" she shouted. "Please wait!"

She was no sooner aboard than a voice said, "All accounted for—haul 'er up," and instantly the gangplank was withdrawn. The horns tooted for the last time and the ship gave a shuddering lurch. They were moving.

"My husband!" she shrieked and pointed toward the dock, but as she did, to her incredible horror, the taxi was gone, and Jordan with it. Only the small straw basket lay forlornly on the curb until a native woman with enormous breasts and a blood-red scarf on her head ambled over to it, hooked it over her arm, and slowly strolled away.

She was still screaming his name when Jordan woke her up.

"You were having a bad dream," he said. "Go back to sleep."

"Jordan," she said, "it was more than a dream. Almost a premonition of—"

He sealed her lips with his index finger. "Come on, Lisa"—there was a hint of impatience in his voice—"it's three o'clock in the morning. This is no time to start imagining things."

"Jordan, you've got to listen to me! This dream frightened me."

"All right," he said, sitting up and switching on the lamp.

Amazed at how the events of the dream were still so vivid in her mind, she began repeating them to him in detail. But it wasn't until she described how he disappeared that her voice broke. "That's why I was so terrified, Jordan. It was that part about losing you."

"Lisa, I'm a grown man. You can't just lose me like a piece of luggage."

"I know that," she told him. "But if anything happened to you, I'd—I'd kill myself."

"Nothing's going to happen to me. Or to you either," he said. "So stop being so melodramatic." He straightened the covers. "Now, do you think we could both get some rest?" Shutting off the light, he turned his back to her, burrowed his head into his pillow, and was soon fast asleep.

She was disappointed that Jordan wouldn't take her dream seriously, that he didn't reassure her—and annoyed at herself for needing reassurance. After five years of marriage, she should have known that he was too practical a man to involve himself in her overwrought maun-derings. As for the dream, she suspected that her fear of losing him was related to the previous loss of their baby. She decided to put it out of her mind.

When it was time to leave the next morning, a taxi, summoned to their hotel by the porter, was waiting for them. Its driver, a short man whose sunglasses were as dark as his skin, stowed half their luggage in the trunk and tied the rest on top of the rickety old sedan with some frayed rope. Recalling her dream, she began to feel a twinge of anxiety. You're a big girl now, she scolded herself. There's nothing to be afraid of. Mentally she reviewed the facts: *All* the taxis on St. Katrina were old and rickety. All had less than adequate provision for baggage.

She settled back against the brittle remains of what had once been a soft leather seat, vowing that she would remain in control. But as they drove along the unfamiliar route to the harbor, she became more and

more agitated, she didn't know why. The winding road, the faded stucco houses, the sounds and smells, all were different from the way she had dreamed they would be. Only the flowering trees and Gauguin-landscape appeared familiar. In just a few minutes, safely aboard ship, she knew she'd be ashamed of herself for being so foolish. As they neared the harbor, their ship in view, they came to a row of gift shops, their roofs thickly covered with thatch. She would shut her eyes until they were past them. But the driver, obviously anticipating that they would ask him to stop, slowed down. Lisa clenched her fists tightly.

"Look, Jordan," she said, deliberately duplicating the words she'd used in her dream, "we never even saw this little shopping area."

"I can take a hint," he said and, signaling the driver to pull over, he reached into his pocket and extracted several bills. "Since you were sick all week we still have some spending money left. But let's not be too long. We've only got about thirty-five minutes till sailing."

"You're coming with me?"

"Of course."

"But you can't!" She gestured toward the trunk of the cab, whispering as she did, "How do we know the driver won't take off with our luggage?"

"You're such a worrier," he chided. "The man's not going to—"

"Jordan," she interrupted him, "in my dream *you* were the one who was worried about the luggage. Don't you remember?"

"For God's sake, Lisa—"

She checked her wallet; nothing but a few pennies. "I'll meet you at the dock as soon as I can."

"If that's what you want—" With a shrug, Jordan proffered the money. She accepted ten dollars. "Don't be late," he said. "These ships leave right on schedule."

After watching the cab disappear down the road, Lisa made her way into the first store and was almost disappointed to see that it contained only some rough wood-carvings which had been stained a deep shoe-polish brown. She was about to leave when the proprietor, an old black man wearing rimless glasses, held up a trayful of shell beads in his arthritic hands.

"Lady, I give you a good price."

Without stopping to haggle, she selected three multi-colored sets and paid for them. Bypassing the next couple of stores, she headed for the one at the far end, drawn there by its crudely lettered sign, THE BASKET CORNER. It was much less imposing than the store in her dream; it was, in reality, only one tiny room with an open door in the back through which, in a dirt-filled yard, she spotted several naked children teasing a yellow dog with a bamboo stick. The store itself, dimly lit and smelling of mold, contained very little merchandise. There were no other customers and no clerk in sight, but somehow she knew she had to find the basket, the one she'd dreamed about. She searched all the shelves, ignoring the clouds of dust she stirred up, the cobwebs she disturbed. Her basket wasn't there. The closest thing to it was an almost-duplicate in the same shape and size but lacking a handle.

She picked it up. It was the same price as the one she remembered. "You like?" a melodic female voice inquired from the open back-door.

"Yes," Lisa said, "except that it has no handle."

"No problem, Ma'am. I can put a handle on for you—take five minutes. But it cost you two dollars extra."

Two dollars was all she had left from the ten. "I'm sorry," she said, "but I can't spare that much."

The woman hesitated. "All right," she said. "I do it for one dollar."

Lisa nodded agreement and gave her the basket.

It took a good deal longer than five minutes for the handle to be attached. But Lisa did not rush the woman. It was almost as if she had to see how far she needed to go in reenacting her dream.

When she left the store it was too late for her to walk to the ship.

When a vintage cab that had been idling nearby suddenly pulled up next to her, Lisa jumped inside and told the driver, a heavyset black man in a stained grey homburg, to hurry to the dock.

Settling against the worn plastic seat-cover, she reached into her pocketbook and, withdrawing the dollar bill, began to fold and unfold it in her perspiring hands. Why hadn't she taken more money from Jordan, an extra seventeen dollars and ten cents, for instance? She took a deep breath. Never mind, she told herself. You don't need more than the dollar.

As they rattled along the narrow road, she averted her eyes from the

clicking meter whose unlit numbers she couldn't read even if she'd wanted to and concentrated on the scenery, only mildly surprised to discover that not only weren't there any diseased palm trees but no palm trees at all. The vegetation, however, was just as colorful and lush as elsewhere on the island.

The driver stopped the cab at the dock, turned toward her, and pointed to the ship. She was relieved to see that he appeared older than his evil counterpart in her dream, and that his fingernails were all of a uniform length. But then he took off his battered homburg and smiled at her, and to her shocked disbelief he began to resemble the man with the domino teeth.

"Let me out of here!" she cried. "Please let me out!" He switched off the meter and studied it for a moment. She threw the dollar bill onto the front seat and, clutching her pocketbook and the straw basket, lunged for the door.

He reached for the handle. "Ma'am, you wait."

"That's all I've—got!" she stammered. "I'm sure it's more than what's on the meter!"

He shook his head. "I don't want your dollar, Ma'am." He handed it back to her. "Your husband pay me at the boat to pick you up and bring you back here."

"He *did*? Oh!" She relaxed her viselike grip on the pocketbook and basket.

"But, Ma'am," he said, grabbing both from her with his massive hand and placing them at his feet, "you go back and tell your husband he don't give me the right amount of money." His domino teeth glistened as he opened the door for her. "In the meantime, Ma'am, I keep your pocketbook and basket."

In a trance, Lisa got out of the cab, and hurried to meet Jordan on the pier.

When she told him what had happened, Jordan insisted that she head for the ship while he dealt with the taxi.

By the time she was on board she was shivering as if she still had the flu, and her line of vision to the cab was completely blocked by a truck taking natives with crates of squawking chickens to market. She watched it and the gangplank as if her life and Jordan's depended on it. As the ship's horns sounded she was so intent in trying to see the taxi

that it wasn't until the truck slowly moved on that she realized that the gangplank had been withdrawn and the ship was on its way.

"My husband!" she shrieked and pointed toward the dock, but as she did she saw that the taxi was gone, and Jordan was gone. Only the small straw basket lay forlornly on the curb until a native woman with enormous breasts and a blood-red scarf on her head ambled over to it, hooked it over her arm, and slowly strolled away.

This time, instead of screaming his name, she stared mutely ahead of her until she could no longer see the place where Jordan had disappeared. But hadn't she known that some diabolical force would take him from her? Perhaps—now that she had time to think about it—she'd sensed this even before they'd come to St. Katrina. Yes, she was all alone now, and bereft, but there was one final step she could take to regain control of her own destiny. She peered over the railing at the churning water below. Soon the other passengers would be going inside for lunch and by then the water should be deep enough.

There was nothing left to do but wait.

As the taxi sped along the road to the airport, Jordan Maxton leaned back in the tattered seat, regretting the years he'd wasted with Lisa. He thought longingly of Stephanie. He could never afford to marry her if he had to pay the substantial alimony he would have to pay his sickly wife. But now that would no longer be a problem. Who would have suspected that Lisa herself, with that dream of hers, would provide such a perfect solution to his dilemma? Not that he'd realized it until she asked to stop at those dingy little stores. Then he'd remembered what she'd said last night: "If anything happened to you, I'd kill myself."

One thing about Lisa—whether it was trying to have a baby he never wanted or attempting to exorcise some evil in her own nightmare—when she felt compelled to do something there was no stopping her. And alone on an ocean-going cruise ship, terrified by his disappearance, she would definitely carry out her threat.

The taxi pulled up to the small terminal. As the driver got out to open the door for him, Jordan Maxton extended his hand.

"Hamilton," he said, "thank you." He reached for his wallet.

"Sir, I was happy to help you play a little joke on the lady."

"Yes, you're a good actor, Hamilton. And your sister was perfect too."

When you thank her for me, tell her she can keep the pocketbook and the basket." He extracted several bills, stuffed them into the other's shirt pocket. "But if you really want to know why I picked you over those other drivers, it was because of your teeth."

"Sir?" The man grinned, his oversized teeth glinting in the sunlight.

Jordan Maxton smiled back at him. "And that's why I'm going to give you a bonus, Hamilton. Exactly"—he counted out the money—"seventeen dollars and ten cents."

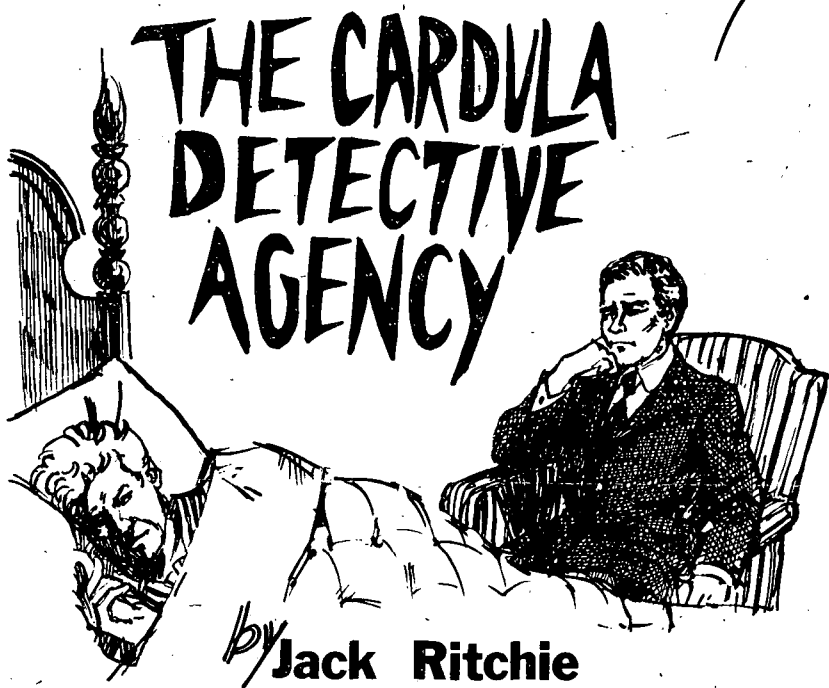


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Apparently there are Counts in every walk of life . . .



I yawned, rubbed the stubble of my beard, and reflected once again what a boring and basically awkward process it was for me to shave myself every evening. Janos—my man—had done the task for me until two months ago, when I had had to let him go. I simply could not afford to feed him any longer.

I climbed out of bed and went to the dark windows. It was raining heavily. Certainly no weather for flying.

I plugged in my electric razor and went to work. I was becoming a bit more skilled at the job. Actually, of course, putting a straight part in my hair was much more difficult. When I finished shaving, I slipped out of my pajamas and showered.

I moved on to the closet and surveyed my two remaining suits. Top quality, certainly, but both had seen better days. I sincerely hoped that some night soon I might replenish my wardrobe with something new, possibly even other than black.

I finished dressing and donned my black raincoat. I checked to make certain that I carried my tobacco pouch. There was no telling where circumstances might force me to spend the day.

Outside my apartment building, I raised my umbrella and began walking toward my office, slightly more than a mile away.

The rain slackened to a light drizzle as I proceeded down Wisconsin Avenue, crossed the bridge, and turned into the alley shortcut I usually take when I find it necessary to walk.

I had almost reached the opposite street—East Wells—when someone leaped upon me from behind, hooking his arm under my chin.

Clearly I was being mugged.

I reached back, grasped his collar, and flipped him head over heels some twenty feet into the side of a brick wall, from which point he dropped to the alley surface and remained still.

But apparently he was not alone. Another and larger figure sprang from a building recess and threw an overhand right which caught me squarely on the jaw. I distinctly heard several phalanges of his fist fracture and he yelped with surprise at the injury.

I then lifted him high overhead and sent him crashing across the alley to join his inert companion.

I brushed off my raincoat, picked up my umbrella, and continued on to my office. Really, I thought, this was outrageous. It was no longer safe for an innocent pedestrian to walk the streets or alleys at night.

When I reached my office, I found a young woman, probably in her late twenties, waiting at my office door.

She seemed a bit startled when she first saw me, but then most people are. She looked at the keys in my hand. "Do you work for the Cardula Detective Agency?"

I smiled sparingly. "I *am* the Cardula Detective Agency." I unlocked the door and we entered my one-room office.

She sat down, produced a silver case, and offered me a cigarette.

"No, thank you," I said. "I don't smoke."

She lit her cigarette. "My name is Olivia Hampton. I phoned about an hour ago. A recording said that your office hours are from 8 P.M. to 4 A.M.?"

I nodded. "They vary according to the solstices."

"It's my Uncle Hector," she said. "Someone shot at him while he was dressing for dinner. The bullet went through his bedroom window and missed him by inches."

"Hm," I said thoughtfully. "Since you came to me, I gather that you did not go to the police."

"We regard the incident as a family matter. All of the logical suspects are relatives. Except for Uncle Custis Clay Finnegan. I mean, he's a relative, but not one of the suspects, because he has millions of his own."

"Why does anyone want your Uncle Hector dead?"

"Because he's going to change his will tomorrow morning when he sees his lawyer. He called us into the study and told us that he was cutting all of us out of his will."

"Why would he want to do that?"

"He said he just read a book and now he doesn't believe in individuals inheriting wealth. He's going to give his money to various charities."

"How much money does he have?"

"The last time he mentioned the subject, I think he said three million."

"Aha, and you want me to find out who's trying to kill him?"

"If you can, of course. But the main idea is for you to see that Uncle Hector is still alive when he sees his lawyer at nine tomorrow morning. After that, there won't be any motive for any of us to kill him because we'll be out of the will anyway."

I drummed my fingers for a moment or two. "I'm afraid I can guarantee his safety only until approximately 6 A.M. tomorrow. After that I have another commitment."

She thought about that. "Well, it's better than nothing, I suppose. I don't imagine I could get anybody else at this time of the night." She got up. "I think we'd better get going right away. If anyone's going to murder Uncle Hector, it's got to happen tonight. I have a car and

chauffeur waiting downstairs."

It was still drizzling when we walked half a block and turned into a parking lot.

As we approached a Volkswagen minibus, the driver's door burst open and a small uniformed chauffeur hopped out. He rushed forward and kissed the back of my hand.

It was Janos.

"Count," he breathed fervently. "It is so wonderful to see you again."

Olivia smiled. "It was Janos who recommended that I come to you. Did he call you Count?"

I shrugged. "That was yesterday and today is today."

"His highness has fallen on bad times," Janos said, "through no fault of his own."

I sighed. "At one time the subject of money never disturbed my mind. I had extensive holdings in Cuba, the Belgian Congo, Lebanon, Angola, and Bangla Desh. What wasn't confiscated or nationalized was destroyed."

Janos slid back the side door of the minibus. "In the old country the people's government has made his castle a state shrine. Busloads of school children and tourists stop there every day, and the grounds are sprinkled with souvenir and food stands. The entire lower east gallery has been converted to public restrooms."

As Olivia and I rode in the back of the minibus, she gave me some background on the members of Uncle Hector's household. There was Cousin Albert, whose right arm was three inches longer than his left, and Cousin Maggie, who liked red port, and Cousin Wendy, who wrote the kindest rejection slips, and Cousin Fairbault, who detested crustaceans.

After some twenty miles of freeway travel, we took an off-ramp and continued on a two-lane road into the countryside, where only an occasional farmyard light broke the darkness.

It began to rain heavily again. Lightning flashed across the sky and thunder rolled—truly a splendid evening.

It was nearly ten-thirty when we turned in at a pair of gateposts and followed the graveled and bumpy driveway through a cordon of grotesque, bare-branched trees. In the revelation of another bolt of lightning, I saw ahead the looming monster of a Victorian mansion. Here and

there a light gleamed dully from behind pulled drapes.

Janos stopped the Volkswagen and Olivia and I rushed up the wide steps to the shelter of the porch. She opened a huge door and we stepped into the large, dimly lit vestibule.

I heard a muffled crash from somewhere deep inside the house followed almost instantly by a brief series of splinterings. Strange, I thought, it sounded exactly like a bowling alley.

"I'll introduce you all around," Olivia said. "And we might just as well start with Albert." She led me through a passageway and then down a flight of stairs to high-ceilinged cellars.

I looked about as we proceeded. Stone walls, stone floors, roomy, damp, musty-smelling, grimed by a century of dampened dust.

I heard the crashing noise again, this time much closer.

Olivia opened a door and we stepped into the bright lights of an elongated room containing a two-lane bowling alley.

A gangly man in his thirties, concentrating intensely, stood poised to bowl. He took a five-step approach and delivered the ball smoothly with a flawless follow-through. The ball hit the pins solidly and he had a strike.

The automatic pin-spotter scooped up the pins and returned the ball.

"Albert," Olivia said, "this is Mr. Cardula. He's a private detective and he's spending the night with us to see that Uncle Hector doesn't get killed."

Albert shook hands, but he seemed eager to get back to his bowling.

I glanced at his score sheet. He had a string of seven strikes. I nodded approvingly. "What is your average?"

He brightened. "I have 257 over the last one thousand games."

Was he pulling my leg? A 257 *average*? I smiled slightly. "Magnificent bowling."

He agreed. "I practice ten hours a day. I would make it more, but that's about all the bowling the human body can take."

I glanced down. Yes, his right arm did seem to be several inches longer than his left.

"When I'm not bowling," Albert said, "I do all of the maintenance work down here. I can even take the pin-spotters apart and put them back together blindfolded." He smiled. "I have 983 perfect games so far."

983 perfect games? Oh, come now, I thought.

But he nodded earnestly. "And the alleys aren't grooved or anything like that. They could pass inspection anytime by the American Bowling Congress."

When we left him, Olivia said, "Albert's father was something of a local bowling celebrity in his hometown. He and Albert's mother were killed in an automobile accident when Albert was ten. He spent six years in an orphanage before Uncle Hector heard about him and got him out. But by then . . ." She sighed. "Uncle Hector had the alleys built because bowling seemed to be the only thing that interested Albert."

I followed her through an archway. "Albert shouldn't have to brood about being cut out of the will. If what he says about his bowling is true, he is the greatest bowler this world has ever seen or is likely to. He would sweep any tournament he entered, and what with endorsements and such, he could easily become a millionaire in a relatively short time."

Olivia shook her head. "No. Albert has never left these grounds since the day he came here. He doesn't want to see any other part of the world, no matter what it has to offer."

She led me to another door and switched on a light.

I found myself gazing upon bushel baskets and boxes of apples, potatoes, beets, rutabagas, squashes, and bins of sand which I surmised contained carrots and other root vegetables. One side of the room was totally shelved and occupied by an array of glass jars containing preserved tomatoes, green and wax beans, and dozens of other fruits and vegetables. Two large top-loading freezers stood at one end of the room.

"Cousin Fairbault does all of this himself," Olivia said. "The seeding, the cultivating, the harvesting. Then he cans and freezes and preserves. He's converted the carriage house into a barn and he raises all our beef, and pork, and chickens. He also makes sausages and hams and even cheeses."

She closed the door. "Fairbault was a Navy pilot. He got shot down and was washed ashore onto a tiny uninhabited island not more than an acre in size. It had three palm trees and all kinds of miscellaneous vegetation, but none of it edible. He couldn't even fish, because he had nothing to fish with. But there were spider crabs and slugs and all kinds of things that crawled and scuttled and came out mostly at night.

Fairbault was on that island for seven years before he was rescued—he was down to eighty pounds. He spent another five years in an asylum where he tried to hoard food under his mattress.”

We took the stairs up. “When Fairbault first came here, he kept that room locked at all times. We had to ask his permission whenever we wanted anything for the kitchen and he would watch over us while we got it. But he’s been here eleven years now and he trusts us so much that he leaves the room unlocked and we are free to take anything we want at any time, just as long as we don’t waste it.”

We returned to the first floor and entered a large, well-ordered kitchen. In one corner, a heavyset woman in her fifties sat at a table working at a jigsaw puzzle. A half-empty bottle of red wine and a glass were at her elbow.

Olivia introduced me to Cousin Maggie. “She does the cooking for us and she’s really the best cook in the world.”

Maggie beamed. “I try to do the best I can and I don’t touch a drop until seven. Are you hungry, Mr. Cardula? Could I fix you a snack?”

“No, thank you,” I said. “I had something last week.”

She blinked. “Last week?”

I cleared my throat. “I mean I have taken nourishment lately enough not to be hungry. How do you feel about your Uncle Hector changing his will and leaving all of you out?”

Maggie shrugged. “Well, it’s his money and I wasn’t really counting on any part of it, even assuming that I would outlive him.” Her eyes clouded with worry. “Just as long as I have my job here. That’s all that really counts.”

We left Maggie to her jigsaw puzzle and bottle and proceeded to the second floor.

“You employ a *cousin* to do the cooking?” I asked.

“Maggie likes to be useful.”

“Why is she worried about the possibility of losing her job here? If she’s as good a cook as you claim, she shouldn’t have any difficulty getting another job.”

“Unfortunately, whenever she worked anywhere else, she began drinking as soon as she woke in the morning and kept it up as long as she was able to stand, or sit. She was continually getting fired without references and was in quite desperate straits when Uncle Hector found her.”

Olivia stopped at an open doorway.

I looked into an abundantly furnished room. A plump balding man sat comfortably ensconced in a deep easy chair, puffing a large curved pipe and engrossed in a book whose jacket read *Secrets with Broccoli*.

Olivia introduced me to Fairbault.

He offered me wine, but I declined.

He held his own glass to the light. "Six years in the cask. I call it Fairbault 71. Because of the climate here, I am forced to concentrate on the northern grapes. Not nearly as ideal for wine as the sweet California varieties, but one must make do."

I glanced at the bookshelves. All of the volumes seemed concerned with vegetable and fruit gardening and animal husbandry. One entire shelf contained what was very likely eleven years of an organic gardening magazine. "Do you do any greenhousing?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No. Greenhousing would expand the season to twelve months a year and too much is too much. Besides, half of the fun of gardening is to store and stock and preserve during the winter months and read gardening magazines and make plans for the spring."

We left Fairbault and continued down the corridor. We turned a corner and found a somewhat hefty and firm-jawed lady in her forties, nearly supine in a window seat, her face deathly white with perhaps a few touches of green. A cigar, one inch smoked, dangled from her somewhat limp square hand.

Olivia sighed. "Why don't you give up trying to smoke cigars, Wendy? You know you just can't do it."

Cousin Wendy opened her eyes. "One of these damn days I'll find the right brand."

"Cousin Wendy is the founder and editor of the Trempleau County Poetry Review. It has one hundred and ten subscribers from all over the country and one hundred and nine of them are also contributors."

Cousin Wendy nodded. "Believe me, it makes for a twelve-hour day. Last month I had to plow through 800 manuscripts before I could make up the November issue. But I suppose nobody really appreciates all the work I put in and the correspondence and the free constructive criticism."

"Now, Wendy," Olivia said, "you know that every one of your readers is absolutely *depending* on you to sift and winnow, to separate the wheat from the chaff." She turned to me. "Cousin Wendy is not only

an editor, but she is also a top poetry person."

Cousin Wendy shrugged modestly. "I try to keep my hand in when I have the time."

When we left her, I said, "Trempleau County? Isn't that about three hundred miles north?"

"Yes. That's where Cousin Wendy used to live. She was a waitress in a roadside café and wrote poetry on the side. Then one day a trucker came on a batch of her poems and started reading them out loud to the customers. So she crushed his skull with a counter stool. She was still in prison when Uncle Hector heard about her and he vouched for her at the parole hearing."

"Just one moment," I said. "Are you telling me that all of these people are really blood relatives of Uncle Hector?"

Olivia sighed and smiled faintly. "Well, to tell the truth, none of us really is. But we like to think of ourselves as cousins because it's warmer."

We went downstairs this time.

"Uncle Custis is our houseguest about once every six months or so," Olivia said. "He came here after supper tonight and Uncle Hector insisted that none of us breathe a word about the murder attempt on his life. He doesn't want Uncle Custis to worry. So I'll just tell Uncle Custis that you are also a houseguest."

We found Uncles Hector and Custis at a pool table in the game room.

Uncle Hector, a short man with soft white hair, had good nature stamped into his face.

Uncle Custis, on the other hand, was tall and gimlet-eyed. He regarded me sourly. "A houseguest? Or are you another one of those damn cousins Hector digs up now and then?"

"How much has Uncle Custis won from you so far this evening?" Olivia asked.

Uncle Hector shrugged. "Fifteen dollars."

"Uncle Custis is quite a pool player," Olivia said. "Eight ball is his favorite game."

"Eight ball?" I said. "Is that anything like billiards? I remember in my student years at the university I played the game a number of times."

Uncle Custis eyed me pityingly for a moment. Then he allowed him-

self an economical smile and explained to me the simple rules of eight ball. "Would you care to try your hand at it? I like to make things a little more interesting. How does five dollars a game strike you?"

I lost the first game, and the second.

Uncle Custis consulted his watch. "I'm just about ready for bed. What do you say about a final game? Let's make it for fifty dollars?"

I agreed and then proceeded to win that game with the utmost skill and dispatch.

Uncle Custis watched as I bank shot the eight ball into the side pocket and then glared. "I've been hustled. I *know* when I've been hustled." He flung five tens onto the table and stormed out of the room.

Uncle Hector regarded me with approval. "Damn, I've been wanting to do that for years."

I turned to business. "Sir, if you don't mind my saying so, wouldn't it have been wiser to change your will secretly and *then* inform your household that it had been disinherited? Do you realize how many people who boldly and blatantly announce that they are going to change their wills the first thing in the morning never get to see the sun rise?" I winced slightly at the last two words.

"Nonsense," Uncle Hector said. "Ninety-nine percent of will changers survive to see their lawyers the next morning. The one percent who are murdered get all of the publicity and give the entire process a bad name." He glanced at the wall clock. "Well, I suppose it's bedtime for all of us too. I understand that you are going to keep watch outside of my bedroom door tonight?"

"No," I said firmly. "I will be inside your bedroom. I do not intend to allow you out of my sight for one moment."

We said goodnight to Olivia and went upstairs.

Hector's bedroom was quite as large as my entire apartment and contained a huge canopy bed and a capacious fireplace.

While Hector changed to pajamas, I searched the room thoroughly. I then went to the windows and checked to make certain that they were all securely locked. I drew the drapes and sat down.

I frowned. There was something wrong here. Something I should have seen, but didn't. My eyes went over the room again, but I simply couldn't put my finger on it.

Hector sat on the bed and took off his slippers. "There's really no

need for you to stay up all night. Why not lie down on that couch? I could get you a pillow and some blankets."

"No, thank you," I said. I went to the bookshelves, found a volume on hematology, and sat down.

Hector climbed into bed and closed his eyes. After five minutes he turned restlessly. He repeated the turnings at fairly regular intervals. Finally he sighed and sat up. "I simply can't go to sleep without my regular glass of warm milk and tonight I completely forgot about it. You wouldn't care to slip down to the kitchen and see if Maggie is still up? If she isn't, could you put a glass of milk into a saucepan and heat it slowly? Short of boiling, you know. And then add a teaspoon of sugar and a few dashes of cinnamon?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "But I am not leaving this room."

He thought it over. "Then I think I'll just hop down there myself."

"Very well," I said, "but I will accompany you. And we will make certain that the milk is taken from a fresh sealed bottle."

Hector scratched the back of his neck. "Forget it. It's too far to the kitchen anyway." He brightened. "There's a liquor cabinet over there. Why don't you help yourself to something? There's nothing like a good short or two for relaxation."

"I do not intend to relax," I said. "And besides, I do not drink. At least not liquor."

Hector sank back onto his pillow and closed his eyes.

The hours passed. It was somewhat after five in the morning when I suddenly realized what it was that I should have seen earlier, but didn't.

I looked in Hector's direction. Was he really asleep or was he faking it?

I allowed five minutes to pass, then yawned and let my eyelids droop and finally close, except for a calculated millimeter or two. I began breathing heavily and allowed the book to slip from my hands to the carpeted floor.

Uncle Hector's eyes opened and he watched me intently for perhaps three minutes. Then he slipped quietly out of bed and tiptoed over to a bureau. He opened a drawer and removed a Finnish-style hunting knife.

I tensed a bit, but he crept past me to the door and disappeared into the hall.

I rose and followed him.

As he threaded through the halls, he looked back frequently, but I kept myself confined to the darkness of the high ceiling.

He paused before a door, slowly turned its knob, and crept inside. I silently swooped into the room myself.

The room was very much like the one he had left. It too was graced by a canopy bed and upon it lay Uncle Custis, gently snoring.

Hector approached the bed and raised the dagger high into the air.

I quickly sprang forward, grasped his wrist, and removed the knife from his grip. He was startled at my appearance and action, but he made no exclamation. He merely closed his eyes for a moment.

On the bed, Uncle Custis continued his snoring without interruption.

I moved to one of the windows and pushed aside the drape for a moment. It was still raining heavily and the lightning periodically fractured the dark sky. Exhilarating.

I let the drapes fall back into position, motioned to Hector, and we went back into the hall.

On our way back to his room, Uncle Hector glanced at the ceiling now and then. "You know, I could have sworn I caught just a glimpse of something flying up there a little while ago."

Once inside his room, I said, "Aha, the old bedroom-switch ploy."

He portrayed innocence. "What old bedroom-switch ploy?"

"When I first came into this room and searched it, I should have seen something, but it was not there. If it *had* been there, I would certainly have noticed it immediately. It took me a bit of time to realize it was not there, but once I did, I suspected that there was mischief afoot and that you were probably at the root of it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Olivia came to me because someone took a shot at you through your bedroom window." I pointed in the direction of the windows. "Neither one of those has a bullet hole in it."

He thought fiercely and then smiled. "I forgot to mention that the window was open at the time."

"Good try," I acknowledged. "But then how do you explain the fact that one of the windows in the room Custis now occupies *does* have a bullet hole in it?"

He resumed thinking, but I cut the effort short. "You faked that at-

tempt on your life and this evening you probably told Custis that his regular guest room was being painted, or something of the sort, and he should take your bedroom instead."

"Why would I do that?"

"Because you intended to murder Custis and make it appear as though the crime had occurred by *accident*. Someone in the house, thinking that you still occupied your own bed, sneaked into the room, and in the darkness mistook Uncle Custis for you, and stabbed him to death."

Hector evaded my eyes and said nothing.

"Why?" I asked. "Why were you trying to murder Custis?"

He finally sighed. "Money, of course."

"But you've got millions."

"I *had* millions. Good solid investments in Angola, Lebanon, Bangla Desh . . ." He shrugged. "Today I am almost dead broke."

Now his eyes met mine. "You have seen and talked to the people who inhabit this house?"

I nodded.

"Then you know that they have all been severely wounded by the world we live in. If they had to return to it, they would break completely. And I really couldn't allow that to happen. So I decided that the only way I could get enough money to keep this household going was to kill Custis. Basically he's a mean bastard anyway and wouldn't be missed by anyone. And we really *are* cousins, you know. Custis has no visible heirs other than me, so if he should die, I would certainly get first crack at his estate. You don't suppose you could let me have the knife again so I could finish . . ."

"No," I said firmly.

And yet I could sympathize with Uncle Hector. He had a duty and a responsibility to the members of the household.

Hector needed and deserved help. I sighed. All right, I would do the job for him. Not tonight or in this house, of course. But some evening a week or two from now when Custis walked a city street I would leap upon him, snap his neck, and remove his wallet. The crime would be put down in the police records as a fatal mugging.

I put my hand on Hector's shoulder. "I absolutely insist that you put the idea of murdering Custis completely out of your mind. I have the strongest premonition that your fortune will change dramatically within

a week or two."

Hector seemed ready to wait. "To tell you the truth, I'm a little relieved that I didn't go through with it tonight."

I glanced at my watch. It was that time again.

I went to the window and pulled aside the drapes. Still raining. A bad night for fliers. I turned to Hector. "You don't suppose that Janos could drive me back to the city?"

"Of course. His room is on the third floor, right next to the bust of Edgar Allan Poe."

I went up to the third floor and woke Janos with my request.

He yawned and consulted his alarm clock. "I'm sorry, your highness, but in wet weather like this, water condenses in the distributor of our Volkswagen. By the time I got everything apart and wiped dry and put together and the engine perhaps started, we would never be able to make it to the city in time. And the minibus is the only vehicle we have."

Damn, I thought, that leaves me no alternative but getting wet. If I leave right now I might have time for a hot footbath when I get to my apartment.

"Why don't you stay here?" Janos said. "There's a nice roomy place in the cellar. I could fix up an army cot. I am certain that nobody would disturb you down there."

We carried what we needed downstairs to a large chamber in the cellar. Janos unfolded the cot and put a mattress on top of it. "Your tobacco pouch, sir?"

I handed it to him. "It isn't necessary to sprinkle the stuff all over the mattress anymore, Janos. I discovered that simply putting the full pouch under the pillow will suffice. I suppose it is the spirit of the thing rather than the letter that counts."

Janos finished putting on the sheets, the pillowcases, and the blankets. "Have a nice sleep, sir."

When he was gone, I slipped into the pajamas and lay down. Really a most spacious chamber. Beautiful vaulting at the doorway. The aroma of damp, stagnant air. I could almost imagine what the place would look like if I brought in a few choice items of furnishings from my apartment.

I sighed. But it was not to be. This was a strange household, but it was really expecting too much of its occupants to accept me.

I thought I heard a noise in the passageway outside.

I put on my slippers and hid in the shadows near the archway.

Olivia passed by outside. She wore a dressing gown, slippers, and from the turban-like creation on her head, I guessed that she had her hair in curlers.

She opened a door at the end of the passageway.

I saw a room elegant with draped antique spiderwebs and in the center of it, on a marble pedestal, stood a magnificent, comfortable-looking sarcoph—

Olivia entered the room and closed the door behind her. After a few moments, I distinctly heard the creak of a lid rising. And then lowering.

I smiled and went back to my cot.

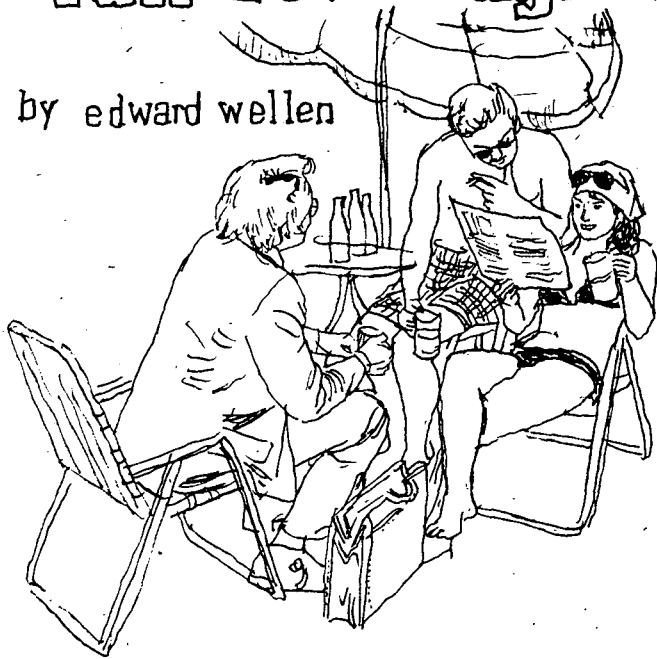
I don't care what tradition demands, I always sleep on my left side.



Better safe than sorry, they say

full coverage

by edward wellen



Chester Burin parked his car at the curb lining the foot of the gentle slope. All the expansive and expensive lawns in this neighborhood had gentle slopes. As he walked the flagstones paralleling the sweep of driveway, he noted small potholes in the blacktop discreetly called for patching. He took in the crumpled rear fender on the last year's model Caddy that stuck out of the attached garage. Rust in the creases showed that it had been waiting some while for fixing. The lawn looked

free of crabgrass but it needed reseeding. A badminton racket on the lawn caught his eye; tape held its split frame together. It seemed as though the Joneses were having a hard time keeping up with themselves.

Mrs. Jones answered his ring. She was wearing a bikini and a gay bandana partially covered her hair. Her patrician voice tried to hide her wonder at the business-suited weekend caller.

"Yes?"

He introduced himself. Mrs. Jones gave him a nervous bright smile—"Oh!"—and her eyes shot to his hands—"Do you have the check?"

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, no, of course not." She bit her lip in punishment. "You wouldn't this soon after the robbery."

He could see the thought turn itself over in her mind. Her eyes shot to his pockets and grew a touch fearful, though her voice sought to convey joy. "Don't tell me you've recovered the jewelry?"

"No, ma'am."

Relief, then back to fear, both under cover of honest bewilderment. "But then I don't understand. Why are you here?"

"Is Mr. Jones around? I wonder if I could speak with both of you."

"Of course. Won't you come in?"

She led him through to the swimming pool in the backyard. On the way he glimpsed a sheaf of bills on the sideboard in the dining room. The topmost bore a red past-due stamp. Even if he had not known before, he knew now how he would have to handle the Joneses. It was not greed but need that had made them do what they had done.

"Dear?"

At first, Burin failed to see who she was talking to. Mr. Jones, in trunks, was cleaning the swimming pool. He climbed into view and onto the patio. He wiped a hand and offered it to Burin. He peered at the business card Burin handed him. His smile wiped away a twitch of nervous alarm.

"Insurance investigator. Are you here about the robbery we had the other week?"

"That's right. I'd like to talk to you about your claim."

"Sure. We might as well make ourselves comfortable. Let's sit down

here. How about something to drink? Is beer all right?"

"Beer's fine."

"I'll get it, dear."

Burin caught the glance of warning Mrs. Jones shot her husband before she left, and his slight nod. He smiled and discussed with Jones the weekend weather and the traffic.

Mrs. Jones returned, carrying a tray of bottles and glasses to the parasoled table.

"Now what's this about our claim?" Jones asked, pouring the imported beer expertly into a glass.

Burin reached into his pocket and drew out a newspaper clipping.

"We received this in a locally postmarked envelope from an anonymous sender. It's O.K. to handle it—we found no fingerprints on it."

His eyes fixed on the Joneses as they read the account of the robbery. The story, which he knew by heart, seemed straightforward enough in its details. Two masked gunmen had forced their way into the house, found Mrs. Jones there alone, and had made her open the wall safe and hand over her jewels. That part was all right. It was the list of jewels that came into question. He knew when the Joneses hit the words "emerald necklace" that someone had circled. And he watched their huddled heads twist to read the block letters someone had written in the side margin in heavy outrage: IT'S A LIE!

Mrs. Jones turned pale and Mr. Jones reddened. They read on to the end, then Jones handed the clipping back to Burin with a shrug.

"What do you want us to say about it?"

"Whether it's a lie that it's a lie. Wait. Before you answer, let me make a point or two. I have to be honest with you and say our first thought on getting your claim was to make sure you had no hand in robbing yourselves. You'd be surprised how often people stage these things. But we're satisfied in your case."

"Thanks." A good swallow took none of the dryness out of Jones's voice.

Burin frowned. "Yes, we think we know the pair. Not who they are or where to lay our hands on them—they've been too cute for us for that so far—but we recognize their *modus operandi*. This isn't the first job they've pulled. What puzzles us is why they should send us this clipping."

"I thought you said it came from an anonymous sender. What makes you think they sent it? It looks like a crank to me. Crime draws cranks like flies."

"That's true. But look at the tone of it. It rings truer if we assume the robbers sent it. But *if* it comes from the robbers it raises an interesting question. Why would they say what they say, and go out of their way to say it, if it isn't so? They have no reason to lie about the haul. If we catch up with them, they face the same punishment whether the necklace was part of the loot or not." Burin narrowed his eyes at the Joneses. "Why would even a crank want to throw suspicion on you, cast a shadow on your claim?"

"Does a crank need a reason?"

Burin sighed. "Let me make another point. I speak from experience now. We find it's tempting for people who've had business reverses in a time of recession, or who've had bad luck in the stock market, or an unexpectedly heavy drain on their resources because of illness in the family, or who are just plain greedy, to make the most of a loss when someone has victimized them.

"Still, most people are basically honest. They may tend to overstate their losses because of confusion in their rush to report the incident and after the report is in, though they realize they've reported something missing that isn't missing after all—being human, all too human—they're ashamed to admit they've made a mistake.

"Part of my job is to give people a chance to correct a false claim. While I warn them of the penalty for reporting and sticking to a false claim, I reassure them that no stigma is attached to an honest mistake if it's corrected before we process the claim.

"Of course, after that it's too late and they must face the same consequences as if they had deliberately set out to defraud us. I don't mean to come on heavy, you understand—I'm only doing my job."

"We understand."

"Good. Then the only thing that remains is for me to ask you if you wish to revise the list of items you claim the robbers took."

The Joneses volleyed a glance back and forth between them, then Jones screeched his chair backward and took hold of his wife's arm. He looked bleakly at Burin.

"Will you excuse us a minute?"

"Certainly."

The Joneses moved across the patio for a muted flurry of gestures. Burin tactfully gazed the other way, though he could make out their distorted figures on his stein as he raised it to finish his beer.

Jones's mouth took on a quirk of a smile as he and his wife returned to the table. "Yes, we'd like to correct the list," he said. "The night of the robbery I was staying overnight in the city. I usually do that when I have to work very late at the office. I had taken the emerald necklace with me that morning to have my jeweler add another stone as a surprise for my wife on our anniversary.

"When my wife phoned me about the robbery, all that concerned me was that she was all right, that the two masked gunmen who forced her to open the safe hadn't harmed her. I forgot to tell her I had taken the necklace. And I didn't realize till too late that the necklace would be on the list that she gave to the police and that the papers got hold of. I've been meaning to correct it . . ."

"And the necklace?"

Jones's eyes flickered. "I never did get it to the jeweler's. It's still in my dispatch case." He reddened. "I'd better get it back in the safe."

Burin nodded. "No harm done. As I said, any correction you make at this time is welcome." He rose.

The Joneses saw him off with their arms linked.

As he drove off, Burin looked back at them and he waved his free hand.

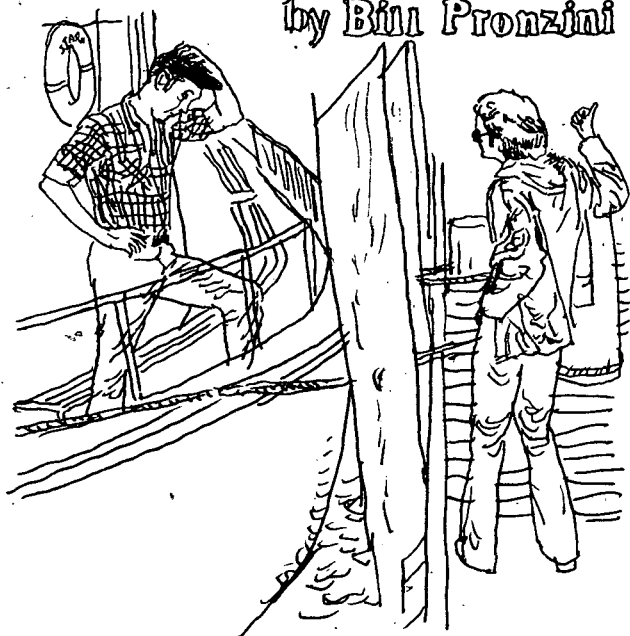
He stopped at a highway pay phone. "Well," he said when he made his connection, "I've made them honest. Sure, they had the necklace all along. Of course they claim it was an oversight. But the way I figure it, Jones had the necklace with him in the city to sell or pawn it. He was staying there overnight, planning to make the rounds of jewelers or pawnbrokers in the morning, when he got the call from his wife telling him about the robbery. It was a windfall for them. They decided it would profit them more to list the necklace among the missing and collect the insurance on it."

He smiled at the mouthpiece. "I'm still sore that they had us thinking for a minute, when we saw the write-up in the paper, that one of us had crossed the other. But what counts is that the phony business card paid off and the necklace will be back in the wall safe ready for the taking. I'm ready when you are."

The man was like the island he'd bought: unfriendly, remote, a mystery to the people on the mainland . . .

smuggler's island

by Bill Pronzini



The first I heard that somebody had bought Smuggler's Island was late on a cold foggy morning in May. Handy Manners and Davey and I had just brought the *Jennie Too* into the Camaroon Bay wharf, loaded with the day's limit in salmon—silvers mostly, with a few big kings—and Handy had gone inside the processing shed at Bay Fisheries to call for the tally clerk and the portable scales. I was helping Davey hoist up the hatch covers, and I was thinking that he handled himself fine on

the boat and what a shame it'd be if he decided eventually that he didn't want to go into commercial fishing as his livelihood. A man likes to see his only son take up his chosen profession. But Davey was always talking about traveling around Europe, seeing some of the world, maybe finding a career he liked better than fishing. Well, he was only 19. Decisions don't come quick or easy at that age.

Anyhow, we were working on the hatch covers when I heard somebody call my name. I glanced up, and Pa and Abner Frawley were coming toward us from down-wharf, where the café was. I was a little surprised to see Pa out on a day like this; he usually stayed home with Jennie when it was overcast and windy because the fog and cold air aggravated his lumbago.

The two of them came up and stopped, Pa puffing on one of his home-carved meerschaum pipes. They were both 72 and long-retired—Abner from a manager's job at the cannery a mile up the coast, Pa from running the general store in the village—and they'd been cronies for at least half their lives. But that was where all resemblance between them ended. Abner was short and round and white-haired, and always had a smile and a joke for everybody. Pa, on the other hand, was tall and thin and dour; if he'd smiled any more than four times in the 47 years since I was born I can't remember it. Abner had come up from San Francisco during the Depression, but Pa was a second-generation native of Camaroon Bay, his father having emigrated from Ireland during the short-lived potato boom in the early 1900's. He was a good man and a decent father, which was why I'd given him a room in our house when Ma died six years ago, but I'd never felt close to him.

He said to me, "Looks like a good catch, Verne."

"Pretty good," I said. "How come you're out in this weather?"

"Abner's idea. He dragged me out of the house."

I looked at Abner. His eyes were bright, the way they always got when he had a choice bit of news or gossip to tell. He said, "Fella from Los Angeles went and bought Smuggler's Island. Can you beat that?"

"Bought it?" I said. "You mean outright?"

"Yep. Paid the county a hundred thousand cash."

"How'd you hear about it?"

"Jack Kewin, over to the real-estate office."

"Who's the fellow who bought it?"

"Name's Roger Vauclain," Abner said. "Jack don't know any more about him. Did the buying through an agent."

Davey said, "Wonder what he wants with it?"

"Maybe he's got ideas of hunting treasure," Abner said, and winked at him. "Maybe he heard about what's hidden in those caves."

Pa gave him a look. "Old fool," he said.

Davey grinned, and I smiled a little and turned to look to where Smuggler's Island sat wreathed in fog half a mile straight out across the choppy harbor. It wasn't much to look at, from a distance or up close. Just one big oblong chunk of eroded rock about an acre and a half in size surrounded by a lot of little islets. It had a few stunted trees and shrubs, and a long headland where gulls built their nests, and a sheltered cove on the lee shore where you could put in a small boat. That was about all there was to it—except for those caves Abner had spoken of.

They were located near the lee cove and you could only get into them at low tide. Some said caves honeycombed the whole underbelly of the island, but those of us who'd ignored warnings from our parents as kids and gone exploring in them knew that this wasn't so. There were three caves and two of them had branches that led deep into the rock, but all of the tunnels were dead ends.

This business of treasure being hidden in one of those caves was just so much nonsense, of course—sort of a local legend that nobody took seriously. What the treasure was supposed to be was two million dollars in greenbacks that had been hidden by a rackets courier during Prohibition, when he'd been chased to the island by a team of Revenue agents. There was also supposed to be fifty cases of high-grade moonshine secreted there.

The bootlegging part of it had a good deal of truth though. This section of the Northern California coast was a hotbed of illegal liquor traffic in the days of the Volstead Act, and the scene of several confrontations between smugglers and Revenue agents; half a dozen men on both sides had been killed, or had turned up missing and presumed dead. The way the bootleggers worked was to bring ships down from Canada outfitted as distilleries—big stills in their holds, bottling equipment, labels for a dozen different kinds of Canadian whiskey—and anchor them 25 miles offshore. Then local fishermen and imported hirelings would go out in their boats and carry the liquor to places

along the shore, where trucks would be waiting to pick it up and transport it down to San Francisco or east into Nevada. Smuggler's Island was supposed to have been a short-term storage point for whiskey that couldn't be trucked out right away, which may or may not have been a true fact. At any rate, that was how the island got its name.

Just as I turned back to Pa and Abner, Handy came out of the processing shed with the tally clerk and the scales. He was a big, thick-necked man, Handy, with red hair and a temper to match; he was also one of the best mates around and knew as much about salmon trolling and diesel engines as anybody in Camaroon Bay. He'd been working for me eight years, but he wouldn't be much longer. He was saving up to buy a boat of his own and only needed another thousand or so to swing the down payment.

Abner told him right away about this Roger Vauclain buying Smuggler's Island. Handy grunted and said, "Anybody that'd want those rocks out there has to have rocks in his head."

"Who do you imagine he is?" Davey asked.

"One of those damn-fool rich people probably," Pa said. "Buy something for no good reason except that it's there and they want it."

"But why Smuggler's Island in particular?"

"Got a fancy name, that's why. Now he can say to his friends, why look here, I own a place up north called Smuggler's Island, supposed to have treasure hidden on it."

I said, "Well, whoever he is and whenever he bought it, we'll find out eventually. Right now we've got a catch to unload."

"Sure is a puzzler though, ain't it, Verne?" Abner said.

"It is that," I admitted. "It's a puzzler, all right."

If you live in a small town or village, you know how it is when something happens that has no immediate explanation. Rumors start flying, based on few or no facts, and every time one of them is retold to somebody else it gets exaggerated. Nothing much goes on in a place like Camaroon Bay anyhow—conversation is pretty much limited to the weather and the actions of tourists and how the salmon are running or how the crabs seem to be thinning out a little more every year. So this Roger Vauclain buying Smuggler's Island got a lot more lip service paid to it than it would have someplace else.

Jack Kewin didn't find out much about Vauclain, just that he was

some kind of wealthy resident of Southern California. But that was enough for the speculations and the rumors to build on. During the next week I heard from different people that Vauclain was a real-estate speculator who was going to construct a small private club on the island; that he was a retired bootlegger who'd worked the coast during Prohibition and had bought the island for nostalgic reasons; that he was a front man for a movie company that was going to film a big spectacular in Camaroon Bay and blow up the island in the final scene. None of these rumors made much sense, but that didn't stop people from spreading them and half-believing in them.

Then, one night while we were eating supper Abner came knocking at the front door of our house on the hill above the village. Davey went and let him in, and he sat down at the table next to Pa. One look at him was enough to tell us that he'd come with news.

"Just been talking to Lloyd Simms," he said as Jennie poured him a cup of coffee. "Who do you reckon just made a reservation at the Camaroon Inn?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Roger Vauclain himself. Lloyd talked to him on the phone less than an hour ago, says he sounded pretty hard-nosed. Booked a single room for a week, be here on Thursday."

"Only a single room?" Jennie said. "Why, I'm disappointed, Abner. I expected he'd be traveling with an entourage." She's a practical woman and when it comes to things she considers nonsense, like all the hoopla over Vauclain and Smuggler's Island, her sense of humor sharpens into sarcasm.

"Might be others coming up later," Abner said seriously.

Davey said, "Week's a long time for a rich man to spend in a place like Camaroon Bay. I wonder what he figures to do all that time?"

"Tend to his island, probably," I said.

"Tend to it?" Pa said. "Tend to what? You can walk over the whole thing in two hours."

"Well, there's always the caves, Pa."

He snorted. "Grown man'd have to be a fool to go wandering in those caves. Tide comes in while he's inside, he'll drown for sure."

"What time's he due in on Thursday?" Davey asked Abner.

"Around noon, Lloyd says. Reckon we'll find out then what he's planning to do with the island."

"Not planning to do anything with it, I tell you," Pa said. "Just wants to *own* it."

"We'll see," Abner said. "We'll see."

Thursday was clear and warm, and it should have been a good day for salmon; but maybe the run had started to peter out because it took us until almost noon to make the limit. It was after two o'clock before we got the catch unloaded and weighed in at Bay Fisheries. Davey had some errands to run and Handy had logged enough extra time, so I took the *Jennie Too* over to the commercial slips myself and stayed aboard her to hose down the decks. When I was through with that I set about replacing the port outrigger line because it had started to weaken and we'd been having trouble with it.

I was doing that when a tall man came down the ramp from the quay and stood just off the bow, watching me. I didn't pay much attention to him; tourists stop by to rubberneck now and then, and if you encourage them they sometimes hang around so you can't get any work done. But then this fellow slapped a hand against his leg, as if he were annoyed, and called out in a loud voice, "Hey, you there. Fisherman."

I looked at him then, frowning. I'd heard that tone before: sharp, full of self-granted authority. Some city people are like that; to them, anybody who lives in a rural village is a low-class hick. I didn't like it and I let him see that in my face. "You talking to me?"

"Who else would I be talking to?"

I didn't say anything. He was in his forties, smooth-looking, and dressed in white ducks and a crisp blue windbreaker. If nothing else, his eyes were enough to make you dislike him immediately; they were hard and unfriendly and said that he was used to getting his own way.

He said, "Where can I rent a boat?"

"What kind of boat? To go sportfishing?"

"No, not to go sportfishing. A small cruiser."

"There ain't any cruisers for rent here."

He made a disgusted sound, as if he'd expected that. "A big out-board then," he said. "Something seaworthy."

"It's not a good idea to take a small boat out of the harbor," I said. "The ocean along here is pretty rough—"

"I don't want advice," he said. "I want a boat big enough to get me out to Smuggler's Island and back. Now who do I see about it?"

"Smuggler's Island?" I looked at him more closely. "Your name happen to be Roger Vauclain, by any chance?"

"That's right. You heard about me buying the island, I suppose. Along with everybody else in this place."

"News gets around," I said mildly.

"About that boat," he said.

"Talk to Ed Hawkins at Bay Marine on the wharf. He'll find something for you."

Vauclain gave me a curt nod and started to turn away.

I said, "Mind if I ask *you* a question now?"

He turned back. "What is it?"

"People don't go buying islands very often," I said, "particularly one like Smuggler's. I'd be interested to know your plans for it."

"You and every other damned person in Camaroon Bay."

I held my temper. "I was just asking. You don't have to give me an answer."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "What the hell, it's no secret. I've always wanted to live on an island, and that one out there is the only one around I can afford."

I stared at him. "You mean you're going to *build* on it?"

"That surprises you, does it?"

"It does," I said. "There's nothing on Smuggler's Island but rocks and a few trees and a couple of thousand nesting gulls. It's fogbound most of the time, and even when it's not the wind blows at thirty knots or better."

"I like fog and wind and ocean," Vauclain said. "I like isolation. I don't like people much. That satisfy you?"

I shrugged. "To each his own."

"Exactly," he said, and went away up the ramp.

I worked on the *Jennie Too* another hour, then I went over to the Wharf Café for a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. When I came inside I saw Pa, Abner, and Handy sitting at one of the copper-topped tables. I walked over to them.

They already knew that Vauclain had arrived in Camaroon Bay. Handy was saying, "Hell, he's about as friendly as a shark. I was over to Ed Hawkins's place shooting the breeze when he came in and demanded Ed get him a boat. Threw his weight around for fifteen minutes until Ed agreed to rent him his own Chris-Craft. Then he paid for

the rental in cash, slammed two fifties on Ed's desk like they were singles and Ed was a beggar."

I sat down. "He's an eccentric, all right," I said. "I talked to him for a few minutes myself about an hour ago."

"Eccentric?" Abner said, and snorted. "That's just a name they give to people who never learned manners or good sense."

Pa said to me, "He tell you what he's fixing to do with Smuggler's Island, Verne?"

"He did, yep."

"Told Abner too, over to the Inn." Pa shook his head, glowering, and lighted a pipe. "Craziest damned thing I ever heard. Build a house on that mess of rock, live out there. Crazy, that's all."

"That's a fact," Handy said. "I'd give him more credit if he was planning to hunt for that bootlegger's treasure."

"Well, I'm sure not going to relish having him for a neighbor," Abner said. "Don't guess anybody else will either."

None of us disagreed with that. A man likes to be able to get along with his neighbors, rich or poor. Getting along with Vauclain, it seemed, was going to be a chore for everybody.

In the next couple of days Vauclain didn't do much to improve his standing with the residents of Camaroon Bay. He snapped at merchants and waitresses, ignored anybody who tried to strike up a conversation with him, and complained twice to Lloyd Simms about the service at the Inn. The only good thing about him, most people were saying, was that he spent the better part of his days on Smuggler's Island—doing what, nobody knew exactly—and his nights locked in his room. Might have been he was drawing up plans there for the house he intended to build on the island.

Rumor now had it that Vauclain was an architect, one of these independents who'd built up a reputation, like Frank Lloyd Wright in the old days, and who only worked for private individuals and companies. This was probably true since it originated with Jack Kewin; he'd spent a little time with Vauclain and wasn't one to spread unfounded gossip. According to Jack, Vauclain had learned that the island was for sale more than six months ago and had been up twice before by helicopter from San Francisco to get an aerial view of it.

That was the way things stood on Sunday morning, when Jennie and

I left for church at ten. Afterward we had lunch at a place up the coast, and then, because the weather was cool but still clear, we went for a drive through the redwood country. It was almost five when we got back home.

Pa was in bed—his lumbago was bothering him, he said—and Davey was gone somewhere. I went into our bedroom to change out of my suit. While I was in there the telephone rang, and Jennie called out that it was for me.

When I picked up the receiver Lloyd Simms's voice said, "Sorry to bother you, Verne, but if you're not busy I need a favor."

"I'm not busy, Lloyd. What is it?"

"Well, it's Roger Vauclain. He went out to the island this morning like usual, and he was supposed to be back at three to take a telephone call. Told me to make sure I was around then, the call was important—you know the way he talks. The call came in right on schedule, but Vauclain didn't. He's still not back, and the party calling him has been ringing me up every half hour, demanding I get hold of him. Something about a bid that has to be delivered first thing tomorrow morning."

"You want me to go out to the island, Lloyd?"

"If you wouldn't mind," he said. "I don't much care about Vauclain, the way he's been acting, but this caller is driving me up a wall. And it could be something's the matter with Vauclain's boat; can't get it started or something. Seems kind of funny he didn't come back when he said he would."

I hesitated. I didn't much want to take the time to go out to Smugger's Island; but then if there was a chance Vauclain was in trouble I couldn't very well refuse to help.

"All right," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

We rang off, and I explained to Jennie where I was going and why. Then I drove down to the basin where the pleasure-boat slips were and took the tarp off Davey's sixteen-foot Sportliner inboard. I'd bought it for him on his sixteenth birthday, when I figured he was old enough to handle a small boat of his own, but I used it as much as he did. We're not so well off that we can afford to keep more than one pleasure craft.

The engine started right up for a change—usually you have to choke it several times on cool days—and I took her out of the slips and into the harbor. The sun was hidden by overcast now and the wind was up,

building small whitecaps, running fog-banks in from the ocean but shredding them before they reached the shore. I followed the south jetty out past the breakwater and into open sea. The water was chop-pier there, the color of gunmetal, and the wind was pretty cold; I pulled the collar of my jacket up and put on my gloves to keep my hands from numbing on the wheel.

When I neared the island I swung around to the north shore and into the lee cove. Ed Hawkins's Chris-Craft was tied up there, all right, bow and stern lines made fast to outcroppings on a long, natural stone dock. I took the Sportliner in behind it, climbed out onto the bare rock, and made her fast. On my right, waves broke over and into the mouths of the three caves, hissing long fans of spray. Gulls wheeled screeching above the headland; farther in, scrub oak and cypress danced like line bobbbers in the wind. It all made you feel as though you were standing on the edge of the world.

There was no sign of Vauclain anywhere at the cove, so I went up through a tangle of artichoke plants toward the center of the island. The area there was rocky but mostly flat, dotted with undergrowth and patches of sandy earth. I stopped beside a gnarled cypress and scanned from left to right. Nothing but emptiness. Then I walked out toward the headland, hunched over against the pull of the wind. But I didn't find him there either.

A sudden thought came to me as I started back and the hairs prickled on my neck. What if he'd gone into the caves and been trapped there when the tide began to flood? If that was what had happened, it was too late for me to do anything—but I started to run anyway, my eyes on the ground so I wouldn't trip over a bush or a rock.

I was almost back to the cove, coming at a different angle than before, when I saw him.

It was so unexpected that I pulled up short and almost lost my footing on loose rock. The pit of my stomach went hollow. He was lying on his back in a bed of artichokes, one arm flung out and the other wrapped across his chest. There was blood under his arm, and blood spread across the front of his windbreaker. One long look was all I needed to tell me he'd been shot and that he was dead.

Shock and an eerie sense of unreality kept me standing there another few seconds. My thoughts were jumbled; you don't think too clearly when you stumble on a dead man, a murdered man. And it was

murder, I knew that well enough. There was no gun anywhere near the body, and no way it could have been an accident.

Then I turned, shivering, and ran down to the cove and took the Sportliner away from there at full throttle to call for the county sheriff.

Vauclain's death was the biggest event that had happened in Camaroon Bay in forty years, and Sunday night and Monday nobody talked about anything else. As soon as word got around that I was the one who'd discovered the body, the doorbell and the telephone didn't stop ringing—friends and neighbors, newspaper people, investigators. The only place I had any peace was on the *Jennie Too* Monday morning, and not much there because Davey and Handy wouldn't let the subject alone while we fished.

By late that afternoon the authorities had questioned just about everyone in the area. It didn't appear they'd found out anything though. Vauclain had been alone when he'd left for the island early Sunday; Abner had been down at the slips then and swore to the fact. A couple of tourists had rented boats from Ed Hawkins during the day, since the weather was pretty good, and a lot of locals were out in the harbor on pleasure craft. But whoever it was who had gone to Smuggler's Island after Vauclain, he hadn't been noticed.

As to a motive for the shooting, there were all sorts of wild speculations. Vauclain had wronged somebody in Los Angeles and that person had followed him here to take revenge. He'd treated a local citizen badly enough to trigger a murderous rage. He'd gotten in bad with organized crime and a contract had been put out on him. And the most farfetched theory of all: he'd actually uncovered some sort of treasure on Smuggler's Island and somebody'd learned about it and killed him for it. But the simple truth was, nobody had *any* idea why Vauclain was murdered. If the sheriff's department had found any clues on the island or anywhere else, they weren't talking—but they weren't making any arrests either.

There was a lot of excitement, all right. Only underneath it all people were nervous and a little scared. A killer seemed to be loose in Camaroon Bay, and if he'd murdered once who was to say he wouldn't do it again? A mystery is all well and good when it's happening someplace else, but when it's right on your doorstep you can't help but feel threatened and apprehensive.

I'd had about all the pestering I could stand by four o'clock, so I got into the car and drove up the coast to Shelter Cove. That gave me an hour's worth of freedom. But no sooner did I get back to Camaroon Bay, with the intention of going home and locking myself in my basement workshop, than a sheriff's cruiser pulled up behind me at a stop sign and its horn started honking. I sighed and pulled over to the curb.

It was Harry Swenson, one of the deputies who'd questioned me the day before, after I'd reported finding Vaucain's body. We knew each other well enough to be on a first-name basis. He said, "Verne, the sheriff asked me to talk to you again, see if there's anything you might have overlooked yesterday. You mind?"

"No, I don't mind," I said tiredly.

We went into the Inn and took a table at the back of the dining room. A couple of people stared at us, and I could see Lloyd Simms hovering around out by the front desk. I wondered how long it would be before I'd stop being the center of attention every time I went someplace in the village.

Over coffee, I repeated everything that had happened Sunday afternoon. Harry checked what I said with the notes he'd taken; then he shook his head and closed the notebook.

"Didn't really expect you to remember anything else," he said, "but we had to make sure. Truth is, Verne, we're up against it on this thing. Damnedest case I ever saw."

"Guess that means you haven't found out anything positive."

"Not much. If we could figure a motive, we might be able to get a handle on it from that. But we just can't find one."

I decided to give voice to one of my own theories. "What about robbery, Harry?" I asked. "Seems I heard Vaucain was carrying a lot of cash with him and throwing it around pretty freely."

"We thought of that first thing," he said. "No good, though. His wallet was on the body, and there was three hundred dollars in it and a couple of blank checks."

I frowned down at my coffee. "I don't like to say this, but you don't suppose it could be one of these thrill killings we're always reading about?"

"Man, I hope not. That's the worst kind of homicide there is."

We were silent for a minute or so. Then I said, "You find anything at all on the island? Any clues?"

He hesitated. "Well," he said finally, "I probably shouldn't discuss it—but then, you're not the sort to break a confidence. We did find one thing near the body. Might not mean anything, but it's not the kind of item you'd expect to come across out there."

"What is it?"

"A cake of white beeswax," he said.

"Beeswax?"

"Right. Small cake of it. Suggest anything to you?"

"No," I said. "No, nothing."

"Not to us either. Aside from that, we haven't got a thing. Like I said, we're up against it. Unless we get a break in the next couple of days, I'm afraid the whole business will end up in the Unsolved File. —That's unofficial, now."

"Sure," I said.

Harry finished his coffee. "I'd better get moving," he said. "Thanks for your time, Verne."

I nodded, and he stood up and walked out across the dining room. As soon as he was gone, Lloyd came over and wanted to know what we'd been talking about. But I'd begun to feel oddly nervous all of a sudden, and there was something tickling at the edge of my mind. I cut him off short, saying, "Let me be, will you, Lloyd? Just let me be for a minute."

When he drifted off, looking hurt, I sat there and rotated my cup on the table. Beeswax, I thought. I'd told Harry that it didn't suggest anything to me, and yet it did, vaguely. Beeswax. White beeswax.

It came to me then—and along with it a couple of other things, little things, like missing figures in an arithmetic problem. I went cold all over, as if somebody had opened a window and let the wind inside the room. I told myself I was wrong, that it couldn't be. But I wasn't wrong. It made me sick inside, but I wasn't wrong.

I knew who had murdered Roger Vauclain.

When I came into the house I saw him sitting out on the sun deck, just sitting there motionless with his hands flat on his knees, staring out to sea. Or out to where Smuggler's Island sat shining hard and ugly in the glare of the dying sun.

I didn't go out there right away. First I went into the other rooms to see if anybody else was home, but nobody was. Then, when I couldn't

put it off any longer, I got myself ready to face it and walked onto the deck.

He glanced at me as I leaned back against the railing. I hadn't seen much of him since finding the body, or paid much attention to him when I had; but now I saw that his eyes looked different. They didn't blink. They looked at me, they looked past me, but they didn't blink.

"Why'd you do it, Pa?" I said. "Why'd you kill Vauclain?"

I don't know what I expected his reaction to be. But there wasn't any reaction. He wasn't startled, he wasn't frightened, he wasn't anything. He just looked away from me again and sat there like a man who has expected to hear the words for a long time.

I kept waiting for him to say something, to move, to blink his eyes. For one full minute and half of another; he did nothing. Then he sighed, soft and tired, and he said, "I knew somebody'd find out this time." His voice was steady, calm. "I'm sorry it had to be you, Verne."

"So am I."

"How'd you know?"

"You left a cake of white beeswax out there," I said. "Fell out of your pocket when you pulled the gun, I guess. You're just the only person around here who'd be likely to have white beeswax in his pocket, Pa, because you're the only person who hand-carves his own meerschaum pipes. Took me a time to remember that you use wax like that to seal the bowls and give them a luster finish."

He didn't say anything.

"Couple of other things too," I said. "You in bed yesterday when Jennie and I got home. It was a clear day, no early fog, nothing to aggravate your lumbago. Unless you'd been out someplace where you weren't protected from the wind—someplace like in a boat on open water. Then there was Davey's Sportliner starting right up for me. Almost never does that on cool days unless it's been run recently, and the only person besides Davey and me who has a key is you."

He nodded. "It's usually the little things," he said. "I always figured it'd be some little thing that'd finally do it."

"Pa," I said, "why'd you kill him?"

"He had to go and buy the island. Then he had to decide to build a house on it. I couldn't let him do that. I went out there to talk to him, try to get him to change his mind. Took my revolver along, but only just in case; wasn't intending to use it. Only he wouldn't listen to me.

Called me an old fool and worse, and then he give me a shove. He was dead before I knew it, seems like."

"What'd him building a house have to do with you?"

"He'd have brought men and equipment out there, wouldn't he? They'd have dug up everything, wouldn't they? They'd have sure dug up the Revenue man."

I thought he was rambling. "Pa. . ."

"You got a right to know about that too," he said. He blinked then, four times fast. "In 1929 a fella named Frank Eberle and me went to work for the bootleggers. Hauling whiskey. We'd go out maybe once a month in Frank's boat, me acting as shotgun, and we'd bring in a load of 'shine—mostly to Shelter Cove, but sometimes we'd be told to drop it off on Smuggler's for a day or two. It was easy money, and your ma and me needed it, what with you happening along; and what the hell, Frank always said, we were only helping to give the people what they wanted.

"But then one night in 1932 it all went bust. We brought a shipment to the island and just after we started unloading it this man run out of the trees waving a gun and yelling that we were under arrest. A Revenue agent, been lying up there in ambush. Lying alone because he didn't figure to have much trouble, I reckon—and I found out later the government people had bigger fish to fry up to Shelter Cove that night.

"Soon as the agent showed himself, Frank panicked and started to run. Agent put a shot over his head, and before I could think on it I cut loose with the rifle I always carried. I killed him, Verne, I shot that man dead."

He paused, his face twisting with memory. I wanted to say something—but what was there to say?

Pa said, "Frank and me buried him on the island, under a couple of rocks on the center flat. Then we got out of there. I quit the bootleggers right away, but Frank, he kept on with it and got himself killed in big shoot-out up by Eureka just before Repeal. I knew they were going to get me too someday. Only time kept passing and somehow it never happened, and I almost had myself believing it never would. Then this Vauclain came along. You see now why I couldn't let him build his house?"

"Pa," I said thickly, "it's been forty-five years since all that hap-

pened. All anybody'd have dug up was bones. Maybe there's something there to identify the Revenue agent, but there couldn't be anything that'd point to you."

"Yes, there could," he said. "Just like there was something this time—the beeswax and all. There'd have been something, all right, and they'd have come for me."

He stopped talking then, abruptly, like a machine that had been turned off, and swiveled his head away and just sat staring again. There in the sun, I still felt cold. He believed what he'd just said; he honestly believed it.

I knew now why he'd been so dour and moody for most of my life, why he almost never smiled, why he'd never let me get close to him. And I knew something else too: I wasn't going to tell the sheriff any of this. He was my father and he was 72 years old; and I'd see to it that he didn't hurt anybody else. But the main reason was, if I let it happen that they really did come for him he wouldn't last a month. In an awful kind of way the only thing that'd been holding him together all these years was his certainty they *would* come someday.

Besides, it didn't matter anyway. He hadn't actually gotten away with anything. He hadn't committed one unpunished murder, or now two unpunished murders, because there is no such thing. There's just no such thing as the perfect crime.

I walked over and took the chair beside him, and together we sat quiet and looked out at Smuggler's Island. Only I didn't see it very well because my eyes were full of tears.



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